

Media Access Guide

Presented by

*The Seattle Times, Asian American Journalists
Association – Seattle Chapter, University of Washington
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AAJA
Asian American Journalists
Association

WELCOME!

The Seattle Times, the Seattle chapter of the Asian American Journalists Association (AAJA), the Western Washington Professional Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists and the University of Washington Communication Alumni Club are proud to present the Media Access Workshop and this Media Access Guide.

It is integral to our organizations' missions that the wide variety and diversity of groups making up our community can get their important stories told.

We hope this guide will help you in thinking through ways to present your story ideas and approaching those in the media.

Beyond the tips in this guide, it is important to develop relationships with media outlets in your area. Find out what types of stories they cover most often, which particular reporters cover the kind of stories you're trying to pitch and what deadlines exist for various media organizations.

But realize that even if you follow all the tips, your particular event or news item may not get covered. That happens – for any number of reasons. Lack of coverage on a given event is nothing to take personally. The important thing is to develop relationships with the media so they can look to you as a trusted source of information on what is happening in your community.

The material in this year's guide is an update of previous Media Access Workshop guides produced by AAJA, AAJA-Seattle and Northwest Journalists of Color.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the individual members of all our organizations who worked on this year's workshop and guide, the volunteers who made this event happen and the panelists who are giving so generously of their time and expertise.

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▶ Getting Started

1. Why do you want media coverage?

Ask yourself why you want media coverage. Do you want more people to come to your event? Build morale in your organization? Raise money for your group? These may be worthy goals, but first ask yourself, “Is my story legitimately newsworthy? And if so, why?”

Reporters and editors are often inundated with calls and press releases. Their job is to decide which of those might be most interesting and informative to readers and audiences.

Often, events that are open to the public are best publicized through calendar listings in print publications or broadcast public-service announcements. Or, sometimes writing a letter to the editor or a guest commentary would get your point across better.

2. What is newsworthy?

Ask yourself these questions:

- Is your story new or fresh?
- Is it timely?
- Is there an unusual twist to it?
- Will it make people laugh or cry or get angry?
- Is it useful to readers, consumers or investors?
- Does it have an interesting angle?

3. Develop a news angle.

An angle is what makes a news story possible. It is the “hook” that makes a topic or event interesting.

Asking yourself, “Who cares?” and “Why would they care?”, is often a good start to developing an angle.

Keep in mind that sometimes the best story is going on behind the scenes. Your organization may be hosting a fund-raising dinner to benefit a certain group. The dinner, in and of itself, may not be newsworthy, but maybe one of the beneficiaries of the dinner, or a volunteer at the event, has an interesting story. That’s an angle.

Ask yourself, “If I didn’t know anything about this event or issue, would I care? If not, what would make me care? Why would it matter?”

4. Decide how you'll reach the media.

A simple, one-page press release is often enough. But if you want to stimulate public action on an issue, you may consider holding a news conference or inviting reporters to attend community meetings. Pitch your angle in the press release and news conference. But remember, just because you hold a press conference doesn't mean the media will come or that it will automatically result in a story. They may not have available staff or they may think other stories are more important to cover that day. Reserve this strategy for major news events.

5. Decide which news outlets to approach.

Do your homework. Read, watch, listen to and analyze as many news outlets as possible. Over time, you'll get a feel for what makes news at each one.

Some stories are of interest only to your group, some to your neighborhood and some to the community at large. Plan your communication strategy accordingly.

It would be great to see your story splashed on the front page of The Seattle Times or leading the evening newscast on KING 5 TV. But those opportunities are limited. Depending on the story, your organization might have a better chance of coverage, and reach more of your intended audience, through smaller community media.

(For more information on approaching specific media, see the section "Strategies to Approach the Media" on pages 7 – 12.)

6. Be prepared for coverage and its consequences.

One thing that reporters and editors hate is getting a tip on a good news story and then learning that nobody wants to talk about it. Before you tell the media about your story, be prepared to handle the coverage.

Also be aware that you might not always get the coverage you'd like. Reporters look for what they believe to be the best story – the most interesting or informative for their audiences. This may not always be the same angle you wish to emphasize.

► The News Release: Your Basic Tool

News releases, also called press releases, are the quickest, least expensive and most widely used means of initiating media coverage. You can send them to several news outlets at once, which increases your chances of getting coverage.

Editors, news directors and assignment editors read news releases to decide whether an event is newsworthy. If you write releases effectively, you're more likely to sell an editor on your story.

1. How do you write a clear and effective news release?

A sample news release is included at the end of this section, but here are some basic rules to follow:

- Start with standard letter-size paper (8.5" x 11"). Use one side and use letterhead if you have it.
- At the top, include your organization's name (if not already on the letterhead), a contact name, and all possible day, night and weekend contact numbers.
- Also at the top, include the release date (the date on which the information is approved by you to be publicized). Either say: "For immediate release" or "For release at (what time and what date)." Most news releases say, "For immediate release."
- Next, write a headline for your news release. What is this news release about?
- The text of your news release should include who, what, when, where and why. It should also pitch your angle.
- Be sure to include a brief description of what your group does – either toward the top if the name of the group isn't self-explanatory, or at the bottom of the press release.
- Also note what photo opportunities might be available, and/or what might be of visual interest for television coverage, and provide access to people to be interviewed.
- A "###" symbol at the bottom denotes the end of the news release.

2. Tips to make the news release work.

- Be accurate and double-check for errors. If possible, have several people proofread your release before you send it.
- Be concise. Keep it simple. Keep your release as short as possible while relaying the essential information.
- Avoid superlatives. Let the facts speak for themselves.
- If you name people, identify them by job title, occupation or other facts.

3. What is a media kit?

Media kits, or press packets, can make reporters' lives easier. They include additional information about your story, saving reporters time in gathering background information. These kits may be mailed directly to news organizations or handed out at news conferences.

Your media kit may include:

- Press release.
- Fact sheets or pamphlets on your organization or event.
- Photographs. Use sharp black-and-white glossy photos and include labels identifying people in the photo (from left to right, and from front row to back row if there is more than one row) and who the photographer is.
- Prepared texts of speeches.
- Copies of previous articles on the topic.

4. How do you distribute a news release?

- Most media outlets have "Contact Us" links on their Web site. Follow those directions to submit your information electronically.
- Send releases about events open to the public at least two or three weeks in advance to most media. Some may need longer notice, so check deadlines to be sure they get your material in time.
- Send releases about events for reporters only (such as news conferences) at least 48 hours in advance, when possible.
- If you have breaking news, get it to the news outlet as soon as possible. Use fax or e-mail. Or you may want to deliver the release directly to the newspaper or television station or call the reporter directly.
- If you can, address the release to a specific editor or reporter by name.
- When in doubt, address the release to the city editor (for newspapers), the news editor or publisher (for community newspapers), the assignment editor (for TV stations) and the news director (for radio stations).
- If you often have news that you would like to release as quickly as possible, consider becoming a member of PR Newswire. This is a public relations wire network that distributes news releases from clients to news outlets, companies and investor-related businesses throughout the nation. PR Newswire charges an annual membership fee of \$125. For more information, contact PR Newswire at 1-888/776-0942.

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**Asian American Journalists Association Presents
First Suzanne Ahn Award for Civil Rights and Social Justice to Helen Zia**

(San Diego, Calif.) – The Asian American Journalists Association presented its first Suzanne Ahn award to author Helen Zia at its 16th annual national convention, Aug. 13 – 16 at the Sheraton San Diego Hotel and Marina.

The award, named in honor of the late Dr. Suzanne Ahn, recognizes excellence in coverage of civil rights and/or social justice for Asian Americans.

Zia, author of the 2001 book “Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People,” was presented with the award and \$5,000 prize at an AAJA banquet earlier tonight.

In “Asian American Dreams,” Zia traces the historical experience of Asian Americans from the 17th century to the 20th century, noting their struggles against racism, discrimination and xenophobia while documenting their progress toward the ideal of equality and justice. The book chronicles the flashpoints in the Asian American struggle for equal treatment and social justice.

“By bringing awareness to a wider audience, the volume actually fosters civil rights and advances social justice for Asian Americans,” said Frank Shih, assistant dean of students at City University of New York’s School of Law, which uses Zia’s book in classrooms. “Through her journalism, Helen Zia has set the standard for the impact a journalist can make toward civil rights and social justice.”

Zia is an award-winning journalist and was formerly executive editor of Ms. Magazine. She has been an activist on social justice issues for more than two decades.

Dr. Ahn was a Korean American who was raised in Arkansas and Texas. Dr. Ahn rose to become a successful physician, neurologist and inventor, while staunchly promoting civil rights and social justice for all Americans, especially women and Asian Americans. The Suzanne Ahn Award is open to any journalist – Asian or non-Asian, AAJA member or non-member. There is a \$5,000 prize.

About AAJA

AAJA is a nonprofit organization with approximately 1,800 members. Our mission is to encourage Asian Pacific Americans to enter the ranks of journalism, to work for fair and accurate coverage of Asian Pacific Americans, and to increase the number of Asian Pacific American journalists and news managers in the industry.

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► The News Conference: Pros and Cons

News conferences are convenient because they let you talk to all the media at once. This is especially useful when you've got breaking news and your spokesperson doesn't have time to answer phone calls from reporters all day.

News conferences also may force news outlets to cover your story since they don't like to be "scooped" by a competitor. They're also visual, which makes for good TV coverage.

On the downside, you should call news conferences with care. Like the boy who cried wolf too many times, you'll find that busy reporters will eventually ignore your news conference if earlier ones were unnecessary. Overuse creates bad media relations.

If you go ahead with a news conference:

- If possible, send out a news release at least 48 hours ahead. But if you are dealing with breaking news (arrests, indictments, huge fire), even one hour's notice is sufficient. Use your release to tell the media what you will be addressing at the conference.
- Consider timing. Mornings are often best – between 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. That gives print reporters enough time to gather more information for a story and you also improve your chances of getting on TV or afternoon radio news shows.
- Choose a place that can hold 30 to 50 people. Make sure it has plenty of outlets for electronic equipment. Or add visual interest by holding the news conference at a site with relevance to the story. Large maps, posters or your organization's banner also provide visual interest.

Timing is everything!

- Keep an eye on potential competition. Don't schedule your event on a day when some other major event is happening, like an election. Think about scheduling it on a weekend or holiday. The media are often starved for news then.
- Know the deadlines of your target media. Schedule the event so reporters have plenty of time to report.
- If your event is visual, such as a large demonstration, consider scheduling it during the noon hour or evening hours when local TV broadcasts are on the air so that the event can be covered live.
- Develop some news judgment. It may not be a good time to pitch a grand opening of a new store on the same day of a major snowstorm.

► Strategies to Approach the Media

When you want to get the word out, whom should you call first?

Most people naturally think of the television station or daily newspaper because they have the widest reach. But there are other options, such as weekly newspapers, community publications, Web sites and radio. The more familiar you are with the various media outlets, the more effective you can be.

Daily Newspapers

Daily newspapers present news stories written by reporters, who are supervised by editors. Editors assign some stories, but most are reporters' ideas. After reporters write stories, editors decide where and when the stories will appear in the newspaper. Sometimes, stories may not be printed until days or weeks after they're written.

Advantages of Dailies:

- If they like the story, they might take an in-depth look at it.
- They're best equipped to handle complex issues that require research and investigation.
- They have more space, more money and more resources to free a reporter for days, even weeks, to tackle an issue.
- They have more variety than any other medium.

Strategies for Dailies:

- Find a reporter or editor who will take interest in your story.
- Do your homework. Find out if your story falls under an area of coverage that a reporter has as his or her "beat," such as health, religion or immigration.
- When you think you have found a reporter to work with, introduce yourself by phone, in a letter or through e-mail. If reporters are busy, they may suggest others to work with you.
- If you'd like the reporter to cover or at least know about a certain event, introduce yourself by phone and briefly let him or her know you will be sending a news release by e-mail or fax.

Strategies for Dailies, continued:

- Columnists are another way to approach dailies. They write two or more columns a week and need fresh ideas. They may have more freedom than reporters to pick their subjects. They often look for seemingly minor stories with offbeat or unusual angles.
- Find the right department to make your pitch. Most daily newspapers have departments for news, sports, arts and entertainment, editorials, business, and recreation and lifestyle.
- Keep in mind that dailies are always looking for good photos. Does your story have a strong visual element? Let the reporter know or put that in the press release.

A note of caution: Your sales job should be directed to one reporter at a time. If you draw two people at the same newspaper into the same story, you risk antagonizing both.

Another note of caution: If you know a reporter at one paper plans to spend quite a bit of time working on your story, don't suggest the same idea to a competing news organization.

Weekly Newspapers and Community Publications

Most weekly and community newspapers or publications tailor to specific groups: neighborhoods, suburban areas, ethnic or political groups. As a group, they can reach as many people as the dailies.

Advantages of Weeklies:

- They have specific audiences perhaps more directly targeted to the people you're trying to reach.
- They'll often give an issue more attention if it affects their specific readership.
- Readers may identify more closely with their community newspaper than with the mass media.

Strategies for Weeklies:

- Get to know each weekly newspaper's audience. Read those newspapers, available in public libraries.
- Consider tailoring your news release to that newspaper's specific readership. One easy way: Send several newspapers the same basic release about an event but for each, insert a quote from a different volunteer who happens to live in that newspaper's circulation area.
- To some extent, weeklies compete with dailies and other mass media. Try sending out news releases so that the weeklies have a chance to print the story on the same day as the dailies and television.
- Weekly and community newspapers have small, generally non-specialized staffs and lack extensive libraries and big budgets. Plan your pitch with those characteristics in mind.
- Work with the newspaper's publication date and deadlines, which vary. As a rule, weekly staffs are swamped two to four days before publication.
- It helps to hand-deliver news releases and to supply photos or art.

Television

Television news usually tells fewer stories in fewer words — typically 10 to 15 stories per newscast, including sports stories. Even complex issues often must be compressed to 90 seconds or less of explanation.

Generally, an assignment editor decides which stories reporters will cover, although reporters are expected to bring story ideas to the table. Then a reporter-photographer team covers the story. Finally, a producer decides which stories to include in newscasts, how long they should be and in what order they appear.

Advantages of TV:

- You reach a broad audience — in their living rooms.
- Your story makes a visual impact that can be strong and often lingers in people's minds.
- Information is current and timely.

Strategies for TV:

- Immediacy is key. If your event or group is doing something that relates to today's news, call the assignment desk or e-mail and pitch your "local" angle immediately. If it can't be covered in time for the evening news, it might work for the late-night news or early-morning news.
- Many stories start as news releases. Send releases to the assignment editor several days in advance. You may also send one to a particular reporter with whom you've dealt in the past. Send a copy to The Associated Press as well since TV assignment editors look at "AP summaries" when they decide what to cover.
- It is critical that you follow up with a telephone call to the assignment editor a day or so before.
- Prepare your pitch. Emphasize the broad interest of your news item. Highlight the controversy or challenge or the freshness of your material. Include a video or photograph if possible.
- Think good pictures and sound. Visual interest and movement are everything on TV — often as important as the news itself. Public demonstrations and car wrecks are likely to get more attention than a room of "talking heads," though news will get covered if the station feels it is newsworthy. Have a good spokesperson in mind — someone who can make a point quickly and clearly.

Strategies for TV, continued:

- Find a compelling setting. If you're talking about poor housing, lure the cameras to a dilapidated home.
- Don't assume the news team knows the subject. Brief the team about what's going to be discussed. If practical, give the reporter written background.
- On camera, look at the interviewer and know what you want to say. If you feel strongly about the issue, don't be afraid to let your feelings show. Don't worry too much about your dress. TV news is looking for real people, not well-dressed models. For technical reasons, avoid wearing solid white.
- Timing can affect your chances of being covered. Events scheduled after 9 a.m. or in the early afternoon give stations the most time to edit for evening shows. Sometimes you stand a better chance on Mondays or weekends, when TV crews are hungry for local "hard news."

Radio

Don't underestimate radio. Radio stations can be great for reaching a wide audience. Their news departments usually cover news with the smallest staffs, in the shortest time for each story, and with the most frequent deadlines.

Advantages of Radio:

- You reach a broad audience.
- There's an opportunity to reach more specific audiences with stations that have a targeted audience.

Strategies for Radio:

- Know the stations. Stations with frequent local newscasts have time and staff to cover your story. Smaller stations with mostly music formats may not.
- Send news releases to the news director or assignment editor. Remind the news director a day or two before the event; avoid calling during "drive time" (6 – 9 a.m. and 4 – 7 p.m.).
- When you call, be prepared to be interviewed on the spot. It helps to have the facts handy and some other knowledgeable people and phone numbers to give to the reporter. You may increase your chances of getting your story on the air if you can tell the station where to reach a spokesperson on the other side of the issue.
- Don't worry about voice. You don't need a professional, velvet voice. But it helps to have your explanations concise and organized.
- Think good sound. Radio reporters often look for "hot tape" — interesting sounds that help tell the story. For example, the sound of crushing glass makes a story about recycling more interesting than simply talking about it. Think of sounds that radio reporters could record in the field that might help create a mental image for listeners.
- Be accommodating. Offer to drop by the station for an interview or to be called up at a later time.
- Timing is crucial. "Morning drive" is the most important time of the day for radio news. Some stations begin early, sometimes between 4 – 6 a.m. "Afternoon drive" (4 – 7 p.m.) is the other big time. Watch the clock. Avoid calling around the top of the hour or the half-hour when news people are most likely on the air and not available to speak with you.
- Talk shows are a good way to reach people. Each station organizes them differently. Generally, you need to contact the producer of the show, not the host. Take advantage of slow news times such as weekends, Friday afternoons or Monday mornings. If the morning paper covered one angle, try to think of a fresh, offbeat, different approach for radio.

► Talking to Reporters and Editors

Preparing to call — dos and don'ts:

- **DO** make sure your story is important enough that it can't be handled through a news release alone.
- **DO** your homework on the story. Be prepared to demonstrate why it's newsworthy. Ask yourself why the story would be of interest to a wider audience.
- **DO** find out which reporter or editor is most likely to cover your story — such as an environment reporter or a politics reporter. If the reporter or editor likes the idea but can't cover it, he or she will probably pass it on to a colleague.
- **DON'T** call during busy times. Deadline hours are frantic times for reporters and if they're working on a story for tomorrow's paper or that day's broadcast, they probably won't pay much attention to you.

When you call:

- **Identify yourself** and say why you're calling. Refer to a press release or e-mail if you sent one.
- **Always ask, "Are you on deadline?"** or "Do you have a moment?" when calling reporters. If they don't have the time, ask: "Can I call you back tomorrow?" or "When is a good time to call?" Don't take it personally if they can't take your call right away.
- **Get to the point.** If you can sell your story in less than 30 seconds, all the better.
- **Keep it simple:** "My name is Jane, I'm with AAJA-Seattle, and I wanted to talk to you about a diversity campaign we're working on. Do you have a minute?" If the answer is yes, then launch into why your story should be covered.
- A reporter or editor may request an "exclusive," a situation where you will not offer the story idea to anyone else. Be prepared to respond.
- Reporters are more likely to give in-depth treatment to a story if their competitors won't have it.
- It helps to send backup material by e-mail, fax or mail if you can, even after you've talked to them.
- **A few don'ts:** Don't tell reporters how to cover the story — few things annoy them more. Don't ask to read or see the story before it appears — good reporters remain independent in their coverage and don't allow sources to dictate the story. Don't insult "the media" and don't insult their colleagues.

During the interview:

- **Prepare any evidence or examples.** Be prepared for all possible questions.
- **State your key points first.** Be concise and get to the point.
- **To increase your chances of being quoted,** particularly for television, talk in colorful language and use bold, short, catchy statements (“sound bites”). Explain how your issues affect people.
- **Be honest. Be candid.** If you don’t know an answer, say so but offer to find out. Evasive or dishonest responses will make a reporter suspicious.
- **Volunteer important information.** You don’t have to wait for the reporter to ask.
- **If the interview is on TV,** look at the reporter and not the camera.

► Building Good Media Relations

It takes more than a great news release or press conference to get to know the media. Cultivating relationships is also important.

- Try to help reporters and editors in ways that aren't self-serving. Occasionally suggest tips or ideas for newsworthy stories not directly related to your group.
- Always be honest. If you lose the trust on one story, you open yourself to suspicion on future stories.
- Look for ways to sell your story as a feature, not just hard news. Sometimes, for example, a fund-raising dinner offers a time peg to tell about an ongoing effort such as a grassroots campaign to beautify a neighborhood. Media like feature angles.
- Follow up. Reporters and editors like to know what happened to the people and topics they covered.

What happens when a reporter calls you?

From time to time, reporters will call you to propose a story, get comments for a story they're working on, or for help in finding sources. Here are some tips for handling such calls:

- Help as much as you can. The fact that reporters are calling you indicates they trust you as a source.
- Be sensitive to reporters' deadline pressures by responding promptly or suggesting others to interview.
- Offer yourself or someone else in your group as a 24-hour contact, or a weekend contact.
- If the reporter is calling you to propose a story, don't give the idea away to another media organization.

Ensuring fair and accurate coverage

Reporters are human. They do make mistakes and if their work is inaccurate, biased or incomplete, they and their editors should be informed about it. Even if the problem is not serious, hearing about it might prevent it recurring in later stories.

Keep in mind that most newspapers and broadcast outlets strive for fairness in coverage of issues, but every person interviewed may not be included in the article.

If you believe a story has been mishandled, here are some suggestions:

- Determine exactly what is wrong. Is it inaccurate, biased or incomplete? Prepare evidence to back your argument.
- Call the reporter first. State the problem and don't presume the reporter was at fault. It may have been an editor or someone else.
- If you believe the story was seriously misleading or inaccurate, ask for a correction or clarification.
- For newspapers, you may want to write a guest editorial or letter to the editor.
- If these methods fail, arm yourself with evidence and write or call a member of the news outlet's management. At newspapers, try the city editor, managing editor or executive editor. At broadcast outlets, try the news director, public-affairs person or the station manager.

► Tell It Yourself

Want to express a view? The fastest and easiest way is to write a letter to the editor. A news article may not always be the best way to tell a story. Often, telling it yourself through letters to the editor, opinion pieces, talk shows and radio and TV guest editorials is just as effective — if not more so.

1. Letters to the Editor

Include your full name (no initials), home address, e-mail address and daytime and evening telephone numbers. Newspapers will verify authorship of letters before publication.

Tips to make it work:

- Make it short and snappy. Have a point and get to it quickly.
- Make your letter newsworthy. Newspapers like to use the letters page to encourage diverse opinions.
- Be creative. Catchy, humorous, even sarcastic letters can be more effective than dry, straightforward ones.
- Write fast. If you're writing in response to a recent event or to something recently published, do it quickly. Editors are more likely to publish the first letters to arrive than letters that come weeks later.
- Most newspapers generally won't run letters already published in other newspapers.

2. Op-Ed or Reader Opinion Pages

You may also write a guest commentary for a readers' forum or op-ed section of the newspapers. ("Op-ed" is a term for opinion pieces other than the newspaper's own institutional editorials.) Smaller community publications will often publish articles from readers in news sections as well. Call or write the op-ed editor or editor of the newspaper to find out its policies and whether they're interested in your article.

3. Talk Shows

You may wish to seek a guest appearance on one of the many local radio or television talk shows, news/feature magazine shows or on-location public-affairs shows. Watch and listen to various shows to determine which are more likely to have you as a guest. Write a letter to the show's producer (not the host) at least one month in advance of when you'd like it to appear. State why your story would interest the show's audience. Remember to sell your story.

4. Radio and TV Editorials

Just as newspapers and magazines publish letters, radio and TV stations may broadcast guest editorials, usually in response to a station editorial. In fact, some stations encourage rebuttal editorials. Check each station's policies.

Prepare in advance what you will say. Explain which editorial you wish to respond to and which points you wish to rebut. Often the editorial director will select or reject your request based on your initial phone call. Be coherent, accurate and concise. Stick to the issues, avoid personal attacks and be creative.

If selected to do the editorial, be prepared to go to the station for taping. A written copy of your editorial will be edited for grammatical and factual errors but the editorial content should not be altered.

TV and radio stations welcome responses from individuals or representatives of a group. However, most stations tend to favor editorials from spokespeople representing established and reputable organizations.

5. Produce Your Own Program

Some broadcast outlets allow citizens to produce their own shows with or without assistance from professional producers. A cable-access TV station, for example, may provide use of its studio and help of producers to those wishing to create a program for airing on the station. Costs vary depending on the amount of production work required and the length of the program.

6. Consider a Public Service Announcement

Public service announcements (PSAs) are essentially TV and radio commercials offered at no charge to nonprofit groups. They provide a valuable community service and fill gaps in regular newscasts.

Check with each outlet to see if it airs PSAs — some don't. For stations that do, check whether they will air a PSA produced outside the station before you put any time or effort into making one. Some stations won't air PSAs made outside their station.

Consider a Public Service Announcement, continued:

Do you qualify? Your organization must be a nonprofit group that offers improvements in areas such as health, education, welfare, philanthropy or culture. Stations usually reject requests from schools, churches, professional associations, political groups or ideological organizations, as well as those that solicit money for campaigns such as United Way. Talk to the public-affairs department at the local station.

Once you qualify, submit material at least two to four weeks in advance so the station has time to make corrections.

Preparing a PSA:

- “Live spots” basically include copy written for the station announcer, timed for a 10-, 20-, 30- or 60-second announcement.
- Include key facts and list the five W’s (who, what, when, where, why).
- Keep sentences brief but conversational.

► JOURNALISTIC JARGON: A GLOSSARY

Media have a language all their own, and it helps to understand the terms reporters and editors use when they're talking about stories. This is a partial list.

Ad

A paid advertisement. This compares to a non-paid news placement, which can be anything from a news story to a listing in a community calendar. Except for smaller news outlets, the advertising staff sells advertising, but generally doesn't direct the news content. Similarly, the news staff directs the news content, but doesn't sell advertising.

Angle

The focus of a story that makes it newsworthy.

Art

Pictures, illustrations, and informational graphics. If you're submitting a story pitch, consider proposing art with it. Good art and good stories usually mean good play.

Breaking news

A quickly developing story, such as a tsunami.

Budgets, budget meetings

Budgets are lists of stories that are being planned for publication. News organizations usually schedule a series of budget or news meetings throughout the day at which they decide what's going in the paper or on the air.

Bureaus, zone offices

Suburban news offices in major metro areas. News organizations increasingly are opening bureaus to move reporters and editors closer to where their readers live. These bureaus are sometimes referred to as zones.

Centerpiece

A story and accompanying art in the middle of a newspaper page or Web page.

City desk

Also sometimes referred to as the assigning desk or metro desk, this is the main newsroom in a news organization. It usually includes reporters who cover police, fire, city hall and other local governments, and schools.

Corrections, clarifications, retractions

When we're wrong, we publish corrections; clarifications, which might include details missing from the original story; and, in rare cases, retractions of entire stories, when the entire underpinning of the story is in question.

Cutline

Caption that accompanies a published picture and describes what's in the picture. If you submit a photograph, you should submit cutline information with it.

Example: James Jones, executive director, Loaves and Fishes.

Deadline

Day and hour a news story must be in the hands of an editor or news director.

Display

Story and art.

Editor

A person responsible for the content and assignment of stories. For radio stations, the news director performs this function; for TV stations, the assignment editor.

Editorial

An expression of the opinions of a news outlet or individual. This is in contrast to a standard news story, which is not an opinion. The same people (editorial board) who run the editorial pages of a newspaper generally do not run the news departments.

Features

Stories about people, organizations and companies that aren't necessarily tied to breaking news. The features department of a newspaper typically produces sections such as Life, Home, Food, Arts, Entertainment and TV.

Five W's and H

The six fundamental questions that journalists pursue: who, what, when, where, why, and how. You should be prepared to address these questions in any pitch to a news organization.

Follow-up

These stories follow new developments in a story that's already been published or aired, or further develop an aspect of it that the reporter didn't fully pursue in the initial coverage. They're also called folos, or next-day and second-day stories.

Example: Stories that are published about world relief efforts in the aftermath of a tsunami.

Guest column

Any opinion column published in any section of a newspaper that's written by somebody who doesn't work for the organization.

Head or headline

Title given to a newspaper story or news release.

Lead (or sometimes, lede)

The first paragraph or paragraphs of a story, written to catch the reader's interest, often by telling the most important facts.

Mainbar

The lead story in a package of stories about the same topic. Also called the mainer.

News release

A specialized letter that contains news. Also called a press release.

Nut graph

Similar to angle, this is a paragraph or paragraphs in a complex story, usually placed very high, that encapsulates what the story's about and what's new and significant to readers or viewers. Sometimes called a sweep or umbrella graph, it can be the lead of the story. It's what editors are looking for when they ask their reporters, "Why do I care? Why am I reading this story?" If you're submitting a news release, you should consider adding a nut graph. It will help the reporters and editors quickly determine the significance of your story.

Public Service Announcements

Also referred to as PSAs. A free television or radio commercial publicizing nonpolitical services and activities sponsored by nonprofit groups.

Reporter

A person who gathers news and disseminates it through newspaper, magazine, radio, television or online journalistic publications.

Sidebar

Stories that accompany the mainbar in a package of stories about the same topic.

Source

Anybody or any organization that supplies information or news to a reporter.

Wire service

A news-gathering organization, such as The Associated Press or Bloomberg News, that provides news to subscribing organizations.

