

Legislation and Policy Issues

Talking to Media and Legislators

Source: Family Planning Council

Conveying Your Issue to the Media: Basic Tips

Getting Started & Pitching a News Story:

1. Identify your target audience and tailor the story accordingly
2. Be general enough to maximize interest and impact
3. Provide a strong news angle
4. Humanize the story — develop a list of people who can provide experiences or quotes about the topic (i.e. experts, local celebrities, or your own patients/clients)
5. Find a connection with current trends
6. Tie the story to a current event, health observance, or holiday
7. Localize a national story
8. Pitch your story to journalists who often write about related topics

Being Interviewed for a Story:

1. Think carefully before you speak to a journalist or reporter. Remember, unless you specify that your statements are off the record, anything you say can be used in a story.
2. Use a list of established talking points to prepare your statements and responses
3. Stay on message
4. Avoid using professional jargon or acronyms
5. If uncertain about the answer to a question, it is better to say you do not know than to guess

Writing a Press Release:

1. Objectively written in the third person
2. Informs not sells
3. Has an effective headline
4. Is concise and to the point
5. The opening paragraph grabs the reader's attention
6. Includes quotes to back up the story or convey opinion
7. Background information is contained at the end of the story
8. Standard information about the organization is in the very last paragraph
9. Should be limited to one page
10. Includes the source/writer's contact information
11. Contains laymen's language with simple words and sentences
12. Bullets are limited and the paragraphs are short

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Conveying Your Issue to Policymakers: Basic Tips

By Telephone:

1. Contact the capitol office and ask to speak with the staff person who handles the issue about which you wish to comment on.
2. If the issue is related to a specific bill, always mention the bill number.
3. State the reason why you support or oppose this issue.
4. Ask what the elected official's position is on this issue.

By Letter or E-mail:

1. Purpose for writing should be stated in the first paragraph.
2. Be courteous, to the point, include key information, and use examples for why this issue is so important.
3. Address only one issue and keep it to one page.

In-Person:

1. Plan carefully — be clear on what you hope to achieve so that the appropriate staff members are accompanying the elected official at the meeting. Learn about the positions and the opinions of the elected official you are visiting.
2. Make an appointment — decide where to have the meeting. Will it be at the elected official's district or capitol office? When calling to make the appointment, ask to speak to the scheduler and describe the purpose of the meeting, who you represent, and where and when you would like to meet. Be prepared to send them a follow-up e-mail with this

information. Many elected officials now have instructions on their website for how to make appointments.

3. At the appointment:

- Be prompt, friendly, brief, patient, and flexible.
- Be prepared — bring information and materials about your issue.
- Be knowledgeable, but don't talk in professional jargon. Remember, most likely, you know more about your issue than the elected official.
- Be political — make a connection between your issue and the elected official's constituency. If you are a constituent, be sure your elected official knows it.
- If you have the opportunity, warn your elected official about what arguments are likely to come from the other side.
- Give your contact information and offer your assistance in the future.
- Be responsive — be prepared to answer questions or provide additional information.

4. Follow-Up — send a thank you letter after the meeting outlining the different points that were covered during the meeting and any additional information that was requested.

Locating your policymakers and their contact information:

Visit www.congress.org and type in your work or home address to locate the elected officials who best represent your interests.

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