

Working With the Media

When working with the media, to get them interested in your story, look for a local angle. Some suggestions include the following:

- fundraisers and activities you are organizing to promote folic acid awareness in your community;
- a profile of an active community member or health professional discussing what they have done and why; and
- personal stories of children or families with spina bifida;

Here are some other tips:

- Telephone actively. Call the assignment editor a week before the event, the day before the event, and then again after the event has taken place.
- Develop and maintain media lists. Once you've created your initial media list, it's important to keep detailed notes; e.g., update (new) contact names, maintain RSVPs, keep a record of phone calls and of articles when published, etc.
- Check with reporters to see how they wish to receive news releases (via fax or e-mail). Be sure to get a reporter's permission the first time you send materials via e-mail.
- Assume that everything you say is "on the record" even if you say something is "off the record." Don't assume that anything you say before or after the interview won't be included in the story.
- Monitor and measure your media coverage to correct misstatements and errors, to identify people in the media who are supportive of prevention issues, and to replicate successful media strategies. You can measure the impact and success of your media coverage by tracking the amount of space or airtime the story received (e.g., a quarter page in the local paper or two minutes of radio airtime), where it was placed (e.g., the front page of the local newspaper), and whether the content was positive, negative or neutral.

Working with media can be an extremely effective way of getting your message to your audience. Keep in mind, however, that there are some things to consider in advance, as noted in the chart that follows.

	TELEVISION	RADIO	MAGAZINES	NEWSPAPERS
REACH	Potentially largest and widest range of audiences, but not always at times when PSAs are most likely to be broadcast.	Formats offer more potential than TV to target audiences (e.g., teens via rock stations). May reach fewer people than TV.	Can more specifically reach segments of the public (e.g., young women, people with an interest in health).	Can reach broad audiences rapidly.
CONTENT	Opportunity to include health message via news broadcasts, public affairs or interview shows, dramatic programming.	Opportunity for direct involvement via call-in shows.	Can explain more complex health issues and behaviours.	Can convey health news and breakthroughs more thoroughly than TV or radio, and faster than magazines. Feature placement possible.
PRESENTATION	Visual and audio portrayal of message makes emotional appeals possible. Easier to demonstrate a behaviour.	Audio alone may make messages less intrusive.	Print may lend itself to more factual, detailed, rational message delivery.	
SPECIAL BENEFITS	Can reach low income and other audiences not as likely to turn to health sources for help.	Can reach audiences that do not use the health system often.	Audience has chance to clip, read and contemplate material.	Easy audience access to in-depth issue coverage possible.
IMPACT	Viewers are passive and must be present when the message is aired, so full attention unlikely. Commercial "clutter" may dilute message.	Listeners are passive; exchange is possible, but the target audience must be there when aired.	May be passed on; can be read at the reader's convenience.	The short life of newspapers can limit rereading and sharing with others, though not with online editions.
DEADLINES	Deadlines are three (3) to eight (8) weeks in advance for PSAs, usually by 10 a.m. to make the 6 p.m. news and the "day before" for breaking news.	Allow several days' notice for public events – with other news, same day is adequate.	Deadlines are six (6) to eight (8) weeks before a publication goes to print.	Deadlines for daily issues are usually 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. the afternoon before the day of the issue. Weekly issues need notice three (3) to five (5) days ahead.
COSTS	PSAs can be expensive to produce and distribute. Feature placement requires contacts and may be time-consuming.	Copy is flexible and inexpensive; PSAs must fit station formats. Feature placement requires contacts and is time-consuming.	PSAs are inexpensive to produce; ad or article placement may be time-consuming.	Small papers may take PSAs; coverage demands a newsworthy item.