

TIPS FOR WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

In today's digital information age, we rely on myriad resources to gather information about substance misuse prevention and what's happening in our local communities. Despite the many ways we can consume news—in print, online, and in person—there are tried and true sources we turn to for credible information about our communities and our children's health. In fact, media outlets continue to be critical sources of information for local communities nationwide: According to a recent Pew Center survey, nearly as many Americans say they prefer to get their local news online (37%) as prefer to do so via television (41%).ⁱ

Media outreach can be one of the most cost-effective ways to educate people about substance misuse prevention and promote positive mental health. Investing your time in outreach will help you build relationships and become a reliable resource for reporters. This tip sheet provides guidance on how to engage media so that your National Prevention Week (NPW) activities can have the greatest impact.

Communicate Your Message Effectively

When working with the media, be prepared to tell your story and respond to questions. All media outreach materials should be concise and persuasive. Media outlets and reporters receive numerous pitches for stories every day, so your materials need to convince reporters quickly and effectively that your event will be a worthwhile story for their paper, website, blog, or broadcast.

Focus on the where, when, and why of your event when creating your outreach materials, and only highlight details that are relevant to current issues in your community. You will have time to share other important information with reporters during a follow-up call, during interviews, and when they attend your event.

Another effective way to communicate your story to the media is to create a set of key messages or talking points and incorporate them into all of your media outreach materials. Consider creating two or three short messages that highlight the mission or purpose of your event, your event's theme, and a call to action (see page 2 for an example). It's also helpful for your talking points to include important details, such as the event's date, time, and location, as well as partners, sponsors, and other pertinent information. Don't forget to include the NPW 2020 dates and themes!

If you or someone you know has personal or professional experience with mental health and substance misuse prevention, you also can offer quotes along with the story or coordinate an interview with the journalist. Make sure to get permission before using a person's quote or providing their contact information to a journalist for an interview.

Tell Us About Your Event

Tell the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) about your event and share your media coverage! [Submit your event details here](#) and include:

- Your organization's name and website address
- A brief description of your event
- Topics addressed by the event
- Target audiences
- Date and time
- Venue name and address

Researching and Developing Media Lists

Promoting and publicizing your event may generate media interest organically, but the best way to receive coverage is to contact media outlets and reporters directly to let them know about your NPW activities.

It's also important to be strategic and create a media list that targets those most likely to cover your event. When drafting your media list, familiarize yourself with media outlets in your area and the reporters who are responsible for specific "beats," or topics. Reporters who focus on your community's or neighborhood's news will likely cover your event, especially if it involves a large part of the community (such as a rally, sporting event, or community cleanup). Reporters who cover health or public safety may be interested in your event if it focuses on healthy living and educating the public (such as a community walk/run/bike ride, health fair, or field day). If your event involves elected officials or local leaders (such as a town hall or mayor's lunch), news and political reporters may be interested.

You want to create a list of prospects—reporters, news anchors, producers, editors, and media outlets. This list can be as extensive or as limited as your resources permit.

Your media list could include some or all of the following outlets:

- Citywide daily print newspapers
- Community print newspapers (distributed weekly or monthly)
- Local news websites, TV news stations, and radio stations
- Community blogs and bloggers
- Community print or online newsletters
- Community or neighborhood online forums

Once your media list is built, you will want to send your carefully tailored outreach materials via email to the reporters you have identified. If you don't use a media database such as Cision or Meltwater, look for an online staff directory or pitching tips on the outlet's "contact us" page, which might have valuable information on who to pitch. Most print and online newspapers provide reporters' email addresses in their bylines or at the end of articles. If their email addresses aren't listed, or you are trying to reach TV or radio reporters, search the "Staff," "Contact Us," or "Directory" sections of the outlets' websites. Don't be afraid to call and ask questions about who to pitch and how their decision process works, especially for television stations, which can be more complicated than print media when it comes to responsibilities and assignment processes.

Writing a Solid Media Pitch

Writing an effective media pitch that gets a reporter to respond is not difficult or complex, we promise! But wait: What is a media pitch, exactly? In its simplistic form, a media pitch is your "ask." This is your way of asking the reporter if they would be interested in writing an article about your upcoming NPW event or mentioning it as part of a larger story.

However, reporters receive dozens of pitches in a day and only look at those that are relevant, newsworthy, brief, structured, and timely. You need to make sure yours stands out!

Generally speaking, reporters like the following types of content:

- Visual assets and stories;
- Exclusive studies and surveys; and
- Data-backed stories and analysis.

No matter what, you should personalize your pitch. The last thing any reporter wants to receive is an auto-generated message that is being pitched in the same manner to everyone on a media list.

While every email will vary, your media pitch needs to do the following:

- Demonstrate that you regularly read and are familiar with the media outlet.
- Show you have read articles written by the reporter (e.g., mention individual articles).
- Connect your statistics, insight, or information with the reporter's current topic area, interests, and most popular articles. Make it easy for them to see why you're contacting them.
- Provide all the details they need to make a decision about the information and you or your organization as a reputable source (e.g., your email or phone number and links to cited information, as well as any applicable references to your expertise).

Once you have sent your pitch, wait for a reply or schedule a follow-up several days later. Most reporters and professionals are busy people with a lot on their plates. If the journalist uses your information and its source, great! Thank them for using your content and continue the conversation. On the other hand, he or she may not be interested in that particular content or information at the moment; in that case, keep communication channels open and continue to build your rapport for future opportunities.

Developing Media Outreach Materials

Different types of outreach materials are used for different media outlets in different situations. Explanations and templates in the following table may help you create your own outreach communications. You can find sample media templates and tips for NPW in the [Promote Your Event](#) section of the NPW Planning Toolkit.

Learn More

[Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#)

Provides data and resources about substance misuse prevention

[NewsCollege Practical Journalism Tips](#)

Offers tips and strategies to strengthen your media writing skills

[News Media Alliance](#)

Shares information about working with reporters at print and online newspapers

[National Association of Broadcasters](#)

Provides information about working with reporters at radio and television outlets

ⁱ Pew Research Center. (2019, March). For Local News, Americans Embrace Digital but Still Want Strong Community Connection. Retrieved from <https://www.journalism.org/2019/03/26/for-local-news-americans-embrace-digital-but-still-want-strong-communityconnection/>