

Generate an Editorial

Building a solid relationship with a paper can help educate, inform and inspire your elected official as well as members of your community. Never doubt that the media has the power to make our issues a political priority, but it is up to us to educate and inspire them about the positive role they can play.

Just remember: **PRESS: Persistence, Relationship, Education, Sensitivity, Success.**

Persistence: There's a fine line between persistence and pestering, but realize that just like our elected officials who hear about many issues in a given year, editorial and health writers are faced with similar challenges and many potential editorial topics. Remember to stick to your guns when the phone calls or e-mails are not returned or the answer is "no" for the tenth time on getting an editorial published. Keep calling, keep asking, keep offering them information that they will realize they want and need.

Relationship: Fostering and building good working relationships with editorial and health writers is the key to success in generating media on a consistent basis. When we are working on developing our relationships with the media, we should act with as much rigor and intensity as we do when we are developing relationships with our elected officials.

Education: Good reporters and editorial writers are always looking for a fresh scoop to follow. Our job is to provide them with current, accurate, up-to-the-minute information. Don't expect that your writer will know more than you on any given subject; in many cases you may be far more educated on these matters than they are. You can become a valuable resource for your editorial writer by providing them with the information and background on issues they are interested in.

Sensitivity: Writers, particularly at a daily newspaper, are busy folks. Be sure to ask up front if they have a moment to talk and be prepared to reschedule your call with them. Be sensitive to their moods and possible gruffness and don't take it personally, stay polite and on message. If the writer you are talking to seems uninterested ask if there is a better person to direct this information to.

Success: If you follow these steps you are well on your way to generating media! You may not get your writer on every media call or to generate an editorial on every issue, but every contact you make pushes your relationship further and further ahead.

Five Steps to Generating an Editorial

1. Do your research.

- Read recent editorials in your paper.

- Pick the ones that are most related to what you want your editorial will be about.
- Call the paper to find out who wrote those specific editorials; most papers do not print their names but will provide you with that information.
- Record the contact information of the editorial writer(s) to whom you would like to pitch your story.

2. Prepare a brief pitch to use when you call the editorial writer.

Plan and practice your pitch before you call:

- Engage the writer by complimenting them on a piece they wrote and asking if they have time to speak.
- State the problem simply and briefly, include that an editorial could make a huge difference.
- Inform about the solutions, including why this is important to discuss right now.
- Also ask for a face-to-face meeting to inform them more about our issues.

3. Call the editorial writer.

- If you reach voicemail, leave a message but don't count on a return call; it's up to you to keep calling until you reach them.
- When you reach your editorial writer, keep upbeat and positive and stay on message no matter what comes at you.
- If you have made several contacts with one editorial writer who seems completely uninterested, it's perfectly okay to ask if there is another editorial writer who may be more interested.

4. Drop off, fax or e-mail some background information.

5. Follow up.

- Phone a day or two later to see if your editorial writer has any questions.
- Bring any new information that comes up to their attention.
- Be kind, be courteous and be persistent. These folks are busy; it may take several calls to even get on their radar screen. Don't give up!

Hooks and Framing

So what are hooks and what is framing?

The hook is how you get the attention of your media contact person, the juicy tidbit that piques their interest in writing a story or publishing your letter or op-ed. A hook can be a day, like World TB Day, or a new publication. It can also be another story in the news that relates to your own, such as a story in your local paper about new poverty statistics or TB outbreak in your community. Hooks can also, at first glance, be completely unrelated to your issue; create the connections between front page news and your story.

The frame is how and what parts of your issue you want covered. For example, just about every paper may write something on World TB Day, but what they say about TB is critical. Framing helps shape and define the debate and educate your target audience about what you think is important about your issue. Good pitches to your editorial writer, a good letter or op-ed, will have your frame in it every time.

How you frame your news will:

- Determine its prominence in the media.
- Define the debate.
- Define the players.
- Persuade people to respond in a particular way, including public officials, voters, and regular community members.
- Inform the public about your position and communicate your messages.
- Determine what images and metaphors communicate the story.
- Determine the competitiveness of your story compared to all other news of that day.

Source: RESULTS Educational Fund's Activist Milestones and Spin Works! by Robert Bray