Media Tools

Neighborhood Leadership Institute Workshop

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About

Media is a means of communication, such as radio, television, newspapers, and the Internet that reach or influence people widely. It informs and influences our perception and understanding of the world. It shapes our feelings and thoughts about issues and events.
Social media are forms of electronic communication that enable us to interact and share information. It is user-generated, has real time content, is accessible, and available at low to no cost.

To effectively use social media, your group should first be clear on its overall goals. Only at that point should you discuss how and if social media can support and advance those goals or a specific issue-focused campaign. Many groups make the mistake of throwing up a Facebook page before being clear about their mission, goals, or campaign. This can lead to social media posts that do not connect well to the overall mission of the group, which can be confusing to followers, subscribers, or anyone visiting your page.
Each social media platform is different – decide which ones would be useful for your project or campaign and develop a strategy for each. Specifically, how will you use each specific platform to achieve your goals?

If you decide to use social media, make sure that there is at least one person in your group who is responsible for managing your accounts. That involves generating content, sharing information, initiating discussions, approving member requests, and responding to direct messages. If your social media page is inactive, people will think that your group is inactive. It is better not to have a social media presence than have one with only occasional activity.
• Popular Social Media Platforms

1. Facebook

Facebook is a platform for users to post comments, share photographs, post links to news or other content on the web, chat live, and watch short videos.

Facebook has the greatest number of users among social media platforms, more than 2 billion. It is especially popular among people in their late 20s and above.

A Facebook page is a great way to share information about your group, post events, initiate or manage conversations, celebrate your accomplishments, connect with other Facebook users, give shout-outs to groups you like, and respond to questions.
Facebook pages are publicly accessible to people who are not members of Facebook and they are listed in Google searches. This is especially beneficial if your group does not have the resources to make a website.

Multiple people can manage a Facebook page.

Facebook ads (to promote your group’s work) are relatively easy to create, cheap, and allows your group to target very specific groups of people.
2. Twitter

Twitter’s primary purpose is to connect people and allow them to share their thoughts with a large audience.

Twitter is especially popular among people between 18 and 30 years old.

Twitter is used to follow specific individuals or organizations – for example, a reporter/celebrity that you like or an organization that offers services useful to your community. Your group can use Twitter to engage followers of its own.

Twitter is a forum for topical conversations as well as for information ranging from articles to upcoming events.
Twitter can be great for getting exposure for your group or project – if you generate or post interesting/compelling content, your followers are likely to “retweet” it, amplifying your message, extending your reach, and allowing you to make new connections.

Twitter can involve less time commitment than other social media platforms if your primary purpose for using it is to stay informed on relevant issues by following groups or people.

Twitter messages can be up to 280 characters – short and concise.

Hashtags for your posts can connect different conversations and topics. Hashtags are words or phrases preceded by a “#” to identify a keyword or topic of interest. Twitter indexes the hashtag phrases and they become searchable by all Twitter users.
• Social Media Platforms Cont.

3. Instagram

Instagram is a visual storytelling platform – pictures and short videos. It was bought by Facebook in 2012.

Though it is visually-rooted, Instagram is not just about pretty pictures. It can be used to share information, raise awareness, and inspire action.

Instagram is especially popular among people between 18 and 30 years old.

Instagram can be used to showcase and promote your group’s work – e.g., a garden clean-up, a performance, a rally for tenants’ rights. It can also be used to alert your followers to upcoming events.
Like other social media platforms, Instagram can allow you to amplify your voice and extend your reach. Through the use of hashtags, your group can reach people beyond your followers.
4. Snapchat

Snapchat is a mobile messaging application used to share photos, short videos, text, and drawings. Snapchat is especially popular among people between 13 and 17 years old.

Unlike other social media platforms, pictures are not posted on a page viewed by followers. Snapchat is more similar to texting. You select from your contact list who will see each photo or video. You also determine how long you want the message to be visible, up to ten seconds. After that time, the message disappears from their phone.
The most relevant feature of Snapchat for community groups is “story.” A Snapchat story is a photo or video posted in a stories section (or feed) of your account, which is visible to you and all your friends/contact list. A “story” allows different users to add photos regarding one event or one location. For example, a harvest celebration at your community garden. You can add a “location sticker” to your stories to show where you are – that allows your friends to see more info about that place.
Media coverage, including social media, can be especially useful for projects that are campaign-oriented. Campaign-oriented projects are focused on coalition-building, a membership base, and outreach to sway public opinion or to influence elected officials. For example, increasing minimum wage to $15/hour.
IMPORTANCE OF MEDIA COVERAGE

• **Reach a Larger Audience**

A well-organized event is great, but if the media covers the event, your group can reach many more people.

• **Influence Decision-Makers**

Because any issue or event covered by the media reaches a larger audience, politicians may feel pressured to take a position, particularly if a campaign explicitly calls for their support.
• Persuade the Public

Media coverage and exposure allows your group a valuable opportunity to educate the public about your issue and, consequently, possibly sway their opinion in your favor.

• Get Credibility

Media coverage can give your issue (as well as your group) greater credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of the public. Getting an article in the paper, having your event covered by a television program, or maintaining a trustworthy social media page can lead people to take the issue and your group more seriously.
• **Develop Leadership**

Pulling off a successful media event and/or maintaining a great social media page is hard work and it offers an opportunity for members of your group to learn new skills.

• **Affirm Your Efforts**

Successful media campaigns are affirming and encouraging for members and stakeholders. They can also inspire more people to get involved.
Framing is critical: How an issue or news event is framed determines how the public will view and understand it. Most news is “spun” in a certain way – to a lesser or greater extent – which has the effect of swaying public opinion. The same story can be covered in wildly different ways by different news outlets. And what is excluded in the news can be just as important as what is included in shaping public understanding.
Our class, gender, race, past experience, values, and interests—all come into play when we try to make sense of what we’re reading. These characteristics should also be considered when tailoring our message to an audience.

Stories with conflict or tension are always more compelling, whether that is in a novel, a movie, or a newspaper article. Of course, don’t create conflict where there is none. But, if there is in fact some tension or conflict related to the project or campaign and if sharing it with the media does not jeopardize relationships or confidentiality, consider doing so.
Social media can help provide timely information from the ground up without waiting to be picked up by the media. It can be a powerful tool as the news comes directly and often in real time from the people who are there and who are experiencing it. However, there is also no vetting or verification of news that is posted on social media. And, just like traditional media, social media can be subjective too, as individual users also frame their story to draw a desired response. Fake news is very real.
DEVELOPING TRADITIONAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

Approach the media only when your group is ready with a clear media message and goals. Keep in mind that it’s not just about getting media coverage, it’s about getting the right coverage.
Before your group reaches out to the media or posts on social media:

1. Make sure your group’s mission statement/purpose is clear.

2. Agree on the specific issue or campaign for which your group is seeking media attention.

3. Answer the questions: What forms of media do you want to engage? Why do you want to use the media (traditional and/or social)?

4. Be clear on what your group wants to achieve with the media campaign: Do you want to heighten your group’s overall visibility, raise awareness or garner support around a particular issue, recruit volunteers, raise money, find partner groups or sponsors, etc.?
5. Identify your audience: Who are they? What are they concerned about? (Keep in mind that different media outlets and social media platforms have different audiences).

6. Considering your audience(s), but without pandering to them, develop clear, compelling, and succinct talking points on the issue. In your message, be positive; state what you are for, not just what you are against. What do you want your audience(s) to know/support? Why should they know about it/care about it/support it?
7. Write a headline that you would want to see in a newspaper or social media post about your issue or campaign, and develop a strategy to work towards that.

8. Identify group members who will manage the media campaign, ensuring that they have the time to commit to it and are well-informed about the campaign, including basic talking points.

9. Identify ways that you will evaluate the success of your media campaign.
10. It is also worth researching effective strategies used by other small community groups and determine whether such strategies would be relevant and useful to your campaign.
MEDI A ADVISORIES
AND
PRESS RELEASES

• What is a Media Alert?

Also called a Media Advisory.

Functions as a brief FYI alerting journalists to an upcoming event.


Sent out 3 to 5 days (but not more than one week) before the event.

Includes logo and contact information.
• What is a Press Release?

More detailed than the advisory or alert.

Includes one or two brief quotes from different project leaders. The quotes should clearly convey the main messages that your group wants the press to report on and the public to understand. The message should be well thought out and strategic.

Should provide all the information a reporter needs to write their piece.

Should be written as the news story you would want to see written. Some reporters will post the press release almost verbatim, with only a few changes.

Don’t forget to send a post release after the event as a last chance for reporters to take the story.

Along with the post release, send 3 to 7 photos with captions. Sometimes, reporters will post only a photo and a caption, not the full story.
TIPS FOR HOLDING A MEDIA EVENT

• Local

To get local coverage, make sure your story or issue is relevant to what’s going on in your neighborhood, borough, or city.
• Timing

If your story is time-sensitive, contact a reporter immediately. Reporters always want to have the latest scoop. If a story is a day old, it's not news to them. If your story is not time-sensitive, there are still timing considerations:

1. It is best to stage an event Monday through Thursday, 10am-2pm.

2. Is your event competing with other events? Do not schedule your event on holidays, religious observations, anniversaries or important days (e.g., Tax Day), unless your event is thematically connected.
• Location

Consider the following points when choosing a location:

1. Is the site convenient/accessible? Reporters are usually busy and may not travel far for an event.

2. Try to find a unique location, if possible.

3. Do you need a permit? Check with the local police precinct.

4. Arrange to have photographers take pictures of your event.
• Visuals

Just as we are drawn to tension in stories, we are also drawn to visuals. As such, make sure to have some type of visual at your media event. Below are some examples:

1. A large banner or sign with your organization’s logo.

2. Be creative and use other visual props relevant to your campaign. (For example, at a media event calling for the preservation of community gardens, several people brought fruits and vegetables from their gardens, which they held up in their hands for the cameras. And a few people wore full-body vegetable costumes).

3. When speaking to the media, be aware of your body language – do not cross your arms, fidget, drum your fingers, play with your jewelry, or act nervous (even if you are nervous, which is natural). Dress appropriately for the occasion and for your audience.
• **VIPs**

Media outlets like to cover well-known figures, like local elected officials, business owners, and celebrities. If it makes sense to have them there, invite them and let the media know who is attending.

• **Duration**

The event should last between 15 to 45 minutes.
• Distribute Media Packet

Place the media advisory, press release, statements from speakers, and information about your group in a folder and give to reporters.

Make sure to assign a member of your group the responsibility of keeping track of which reporters attend, ensuring they are comfortable during the event and potentially ushering them to speakers for interviews.
• Identify one or two members of your group to speak with reporters

These are individuals who know your talking points well and can speak about the issue or project in a clear and compelling way. If other members of your group are approached by reporters, they should direct them to the designated individuals rather than offer their own statements.
• **Equipment**

Consider what you’ll need for the event (e.g., a megaphone, podium, portable microphone, etc.)

• **Attendance**

Find out which reporters attended the event. Follow up with the no-shows by sending them the post-release along with photos and captions.
TIPS FOR INTERACTING WITH THE MEDIA

1. Be polite, appreciative, and brief.

Remember that you will likely want the reporters to cover your project again, or other work your group takes on in the future. Keep your statements brief (as they’re likely busy or on deadline) and thank them for the coverage.
2. Stick to your talking points.

When speaking with reporters, do not stray off into personal commentaries or make impromptu statements. If a reporter attempts to direct you away from your talking points or extract information that your group has not yet discussed or decided to share, it is entirely fine to answer with your talking points, even if that does not address the reporter’s question.

3. Correct inaccurate statements.

If you feel a reporter has made a mistake or ‘put words in your mouth,’ correct it immediately (and politely). Though corrections should be made during the interview, if you have to, contact the reporter after the interview. Better late than never.

4. Don’t say ‘No Comment.’

This makes it seem like you are hiding something or being evasive. If it’s a question you don’t want to answer, restate your talking points.
5. Don’t lie, embellish, or generalize.

Honesty and credibility are valuable – once you lose either, it’s nearly impossible to get it back.

6. Don’t feel pressured to fill an awkward silence.

This is a tool used by reporters to elicit an unrehearsed response. Pause and ensure that your answer is in line with your message.

7. Don’t be defensive, annoyed, or lose your temper.

You lose control of an interview if you respond to what you perceive as unfair treatment. It is certainly possible for reporters to be rude and aggressive, however don’t let that shake your composure. Instead, redirect questions or behavior you believe to be unfair by sticking to your talking points.