



FEDERAL ELECTION 2006: MEDIA KIT

Elections provide an excellent opportunity for Council activists to get their message out. Chapters have the unique ability to work with local media outlets, building relationships with reporters, and ensuring that issues such as fair trade, public health, energy and water don't get lost in the fray.

DEFINITIONS AND DEADLINES

- **A public service announcement (PSA)** is intended to be distributed to media outlets for use in promoting your event to the public.
 - Identify the media that runs PSAs and check their deadlines – magazines or bi-weeklies, may be as many as two or three weeks before the event. For radio or TV, it may only be 2-3 days before the event.
- **A media advisory** is intended to get media out to your event (press conference, rally, public forum, etc).
 - Send the media advisory the week prior to the event. If it is on the weekend, send the advisory on Wednesday. If it's a weeknight event, send the advisory two to three days beforehand.
- **A press release** is intended to give reporters the information they need to write a story (and ideally call you for further information).
 - Send press releases the day of the event. Your aim is to gain attention, and to give the media idea of what is newsworthy about your story.

TIPS FOR PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

Public Service Announcements (PSAs) are a way to get your message out on radio or television. Most local electronic media outlets have a community calendar or designated time for event announcements.

PSAs can be helpful for getting people out to your event, but there is no guarantee they will be used, so don't rely on them to fill the auditorium. They are only one of your outreach and publicity tools.

They should be written in a way that you would imagine them read live on-air — they are a script rather than a press release. Though they may not get read exactly the way you write them, they often will be.

- Make sure you cover who, what, where, when and how.
- Include contact information that you're willing to have broadcast, and make sure the contact person can be easily reached.

DISTRIBUTION

- Call the local papers, television and radio stations to find out whom you should direct your information.
- Call after you've sent it to confirm that it was received. Don't pester them though – media outlets don't generally return calls – they get lots of calls from people like us every day and don't often have time to return them and still get their jobs done. Be patient.

[SAMPLE] PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

run until [fill in day of event here]

contact name
 contact phone
 contact fax
 contact email

Citizens' groups to hold all-candidates meeting

Grassroots community groups are urging Canadians to vote for candidates who favour citizens' rights over corporate interests.

This is why the [your city] chapter of the Council of Canadians and [name of community group] will be holding an all-candidates meeting on [date] to encourage candidates to clarify their platforms, and debate the issues that are important to Canadians. The evening is open to the public.

The debate begins at [time event starts], at the [venue] and will be moderated by [name]. Doors open at [time]. Admission is free.

For more information contact [name] at [phone number].

TIPS FOR MEDIA ADVISORIES

If you choose to open your event to the media, you could send a media advisory. Use your judgment as to when or whether to send this out. It could be as early as two or three weeks before your event, or as late as a few days before your event, depending on the nature of the media outlets you send it to (weekly publications need more lead-time, for example). In any case, the follow-up calls are crucial to getting journalists' attention.

One of the biggest mistakes local groups make with media work is not being totally available when the media calls. Reporters don't have time to wait and will often call you, then call someone else to get a quote. If you miss the call, you can miss the story. Make sure your contact is available at the number on your materials from first thing in the morning into the evening. Return any messages from journalists as promptly as possible.

[SAMPLE] MEDIA ADVISORY - [Date]

Citizens' group to hold all-candidates meeting

WHO: The [your city] chapter of the Council of Canadians

WHAT: A meeting designed to give federal candidates in the [your riding] a chance to clarify their platforms, and answer tough questions from concerned citizens.

WHEN: [date and time of event]

WHERE: [venue]

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For more information, or to arrange an interview in advance, contact [your contact info].

TIPS FOR PRESS RELEASES

Below is a template you can use and adapt for your press release. You may want to write your own press release to reflect local realities and issues.

Keep in mind when you write your release what makes a story newsworthy: dramatic human interest, controversy, local angles, calendar tie-ins and major events, to name a few.

Frame the story, and your release, so it has significance, drama, timeliness and impact for viewers, listeners, and readers.

See the following sample:

[SAMPLE] PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[Date]

Citizens grill candidates at community meeting

(your community) Grassroots community groups have urged Canadians to vote for candidates who favour citizens' rights over corporate interests.

At a meet-the-candidates meeting sponsored by the [your city] chapter of the Council of Canadians, residents took candidates to task for their parties' record on issues ranging from health care privatization to strengthened ties with the United States that compromise independent Canadian policy.

"We have had enough of corporate collusion in the workings of government," said Jane Activist, a long-time resident of [your community]. "The right-wing lobby is trying to convince people that we need less government. What we really need is accountable government."

Chapter members will be going door-to-door in [your community], to distribute a copy of the Council of Canadians' Voter's Guide, which outlines the major parties' positions on issues such as public health care, trade and Canada-U.S. relations.

For more information contact [name] at [phone number].

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TIPS FOR MAKING MEDIA CALLS

Follow-up calls to reporters, or "pitching" can make or break getting your story in the news. Reporters receive dozens of press releases a day, and your call can help make your event stand out from the pack. It's not always easy, though.

Canadian reporters receive an average of 25 pitches a day, and follow up on 2-3. In today's newsroom, deadlines are tight and resources are often scarce. Take some time before you call to formulate your thoughts. Try and imagine what might get an overworked reporter's attention.

These tips are designed to demystify the news-making process, and help you get your message across.

Target your reporter

Your best bet is to call reporters you know, or have worked with in the past. If they can't cover the story, they'll likely refer you to someone else.

If you have no prior connection with a particular media outlet, find out who is covering the elections "beat." Keep track of all of your media contacts, including phone, fax and email addresses.

Be timely

Do not call reporters when you know they are on deadline. Mid-morning and early afternoon are good times to make pitches. Be sensitive to their moods. If they sound rushed, offer to call back later. If you get the answering machine, leave the basics and call back at a better time.

Express enthusiasm

When it comes to pitching you're competing with a long line of other callers. You need to sound like you believe in and have confidence in the story.

Hooks galore

What makes a story newsworthy? Again, it's dramatic human interest, controversy, local angles, calendar tie-ins and major events. Frame the story so it has significance, drama, timeliness and impact for viewers, listeners, and readers.

Anticipate and answer questions

Take some time to think through the likely questions and their answers.

Have a back-up plan

If it becomes clear a reporter isn't interested, have a different angle ready. For example, if the reporter can't make it to the event, they might want to interview a speaker or organizer at a different time. Don't overdo it though. Unfortunately, there are times when you will not be able to get coverage.

RESOURCES AND TUTORIALS

For more information on working with the media go to the Council of Canadians' *Action Link: A Guide for Council Activists* available at www.canadians.org.

Other great resources for activist-based media work:

The Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society's Media Communications Tool Kit

http://www.impacs.org/pdfs/communications_toolkit.pdf

The Spin Project's Media Tutorials

<http://www.spinproject.org/resources/tutorials.php3>

The Media Trust's online media guides

http://www.mediatrust.org/online_guides/index.html