

ASIAN AMERICAN JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION

AAJA

**HOW
TO GET
YOUR
NEWS
IN THE
NEWS:**

A MEDIA ACCESS

HANDBOOK

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The Asian American Journalists Association published this booklet to help promote community access to news organizations and encourage accurate news coverage of Asian Americans and others — both major parts of AAJA's mission.

AAJA, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, was formed in 1981 to: encourage Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders to enter the ranks of journalism; to work for fair and accurate coverage of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders; and to increase the number of Asian American and Pacific Islander journalists and news managers in the industry.

The Media Access Workshops at the AAJA National Convention and the printing of this booklet and an accompanying manual on how to produce a media access workshop are made possible through a three-year grant from The New York Times Company Foundation.

FROM AAJA NATIONAL

For many non-profit organizations, the lack of resources poses a big challenge to their efforts to inform the media and the public-at-large about the many good programs and services they offer to our communities. As we all know, the effective delivery of these programs and services is contingent upon a well-informed constituency or clientele.

With the ever-changing demographics of local communities and the continuing evolution of the technologies for mass communications, it benefits community organizations to gain basic skills, if not the expertise, in media access.

For many years now, the Asian American Journalists Association has been assisting non-profit organizations by training their staff to write effective press releases and letters to the editor, how to contact the appropriate news desk and personnel, how to convene a press conference, and how to deal with unfair news coverage. These Media Access Workshops are in line with AAJA's core mission of ensuring fair and accurate coverage of Asian American and Pacific Islander communities and issues.

This handbook supplements the media training organized and conducted by our volunteer training teams, and is made possible through a generous grant from The New York Times Company Foundation. A special thank you to Jessie Mangaliman of the AAJA San Francisco Bay Area chapter and Scott Nishimura of the AAJA Texas chapter for their valuable work on this project.

We hope that through both the training and this manual, staff of community organizations will be better equipped to deal with print, broadcast and online media and significantly increase the chances of "getting their news in the news."

RENE M. ASTUDILLO

Executive Director

ASIAN AMERICAN JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION

CLIMBING THE PUBLICITY LADDER

No non-profit should view the news media as its sole, or even primary means of communication. A solid news media strategy should be part of a well-rounded publicity campaign that can include direct mail, a strong web site, billboards and bus benches, and help from sponsors.

How can you improve your chances of getting into the newspaper, or onto radio, or television or online?

Step 1.

Understand that news outlets can receive hundreds or thousands of pitches every day, across the wires, over the phone, via fax and email, through the regular mail, even from people who walk in our doors. Reporters and editors can easily overlook good local stories.

Step 2.

Don't assume we know about the good work you're doing. Tell us about it.

Try viewing your campaign to get into the paper or on TV or radio as a climb up a ladder. The bottom rung is easy. The top one isn't as difficult as you might think.

It's relatively easy to step up one rung in pitching your story to any news organization. Most groups stop there, satisfied with getting a notice of their upcoming meeting published in the community calendar. But in many cases, you might be able to move well beyond that first rung, with a little bit of effort and thinking. What's the top rung? It maybe a story on the front page of the paper, or a spot on the six o'clock news.

If you're planning a Chinese New Year celebration, the minority affairs reporter at your local newspaper might be interested in the event. The entertainment section might be able to run short blurbs in its calendar. Coordinate your publicity effort with other groups in the

community that are planning similar events, and the paper might decide to publish a calendar specifically about upcoming Chinese New Year celebrations, or write a story about them. If your event will draw a lot of people, the paper might come out and do a story about it, complete with pictures. Good stories and good pictures usually equal “good play,” in newsroom vernacular. The story could become the centerpiece on the front page of the paper, or on the front page of the second section. Local TV and radio stations might also be interested, given the sensory aspects of the story: images and sounds of giggling children, the color and drumbeat of a lion dance.

And your local news organizations might be interested in your event beyond viewing it as a news story. We might also be interested in buying a sponsorship to it, which would help increase your organization’s exposure dramatically.

Bottom line: Don’t be afraid to ask for coverage and propose specific ideas.

KNOW YOUR LOCAL MEDIA

1. MOST PEOPLE WANT THEIR STORY COVERED IN THE MAJOR METROPOLITAN DAILY NEWSPAPERS OR ON NETWORK RADIO AND TV.

But because those outlets generally cater to large general audiences, your story may have a better chance of getting coverage in a smaller community print or broadcast outlet, the ethnic media, or in, say, a targeted section of a major newspaper.

Major metro newspapers, for example, increasingly are creating publications that are targeted at specific demographic groups: geographic, ethnic, young people, commuters, and so on.

2. READ, WATCH AND STUDY AS MANY NEWS OUTLETS AS POSSIBLE, and try to get a feel for what makes news at each one.
3. LOOK FOR ENTRY POINTS. Does your local newspaper have beat reporters who have covered your organization, or ones similar to it? Does it have columnists who write about topics that your group cares about? Does the paper have standing features, such as community calendars or picture pages that focus on community events? Does it accept guest columns? And, who's in charge?

At a big paper, the editor who can run a blurb about your event in the entertainment calendar is probably different than the one who can assign a story about it in the metro section of the newspaper.

4. AT A MINIMUM, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO GET YOUR EVENT LISTED IN THE COMMUNITY CALENDAR. These can be published in the metro, sports, entertainment or business sections, and include listings of fundraising events, fairs, lectures, films, seminars, workshops, dances, concerts, and meetings of general interest.

5. DECIDE WHICH VEHICLES ARE BEST. If your group is providing a valuable public service, such as free health care for the elderly, a public service announcement on local radio and TV might be best. Or you may offer yourself up as a guest on a talk show or as a guest editorial writer.

MAKE YOUR PITCH STAND OUT

1. **MAKE IT LOCAL.** This sounds obvious, but virtually all news organizations are intensively local in their focus. If you're promoting an event and just starting out, try writing a short news release or pitch letter and emailing it or faxing it to your local media outlets. (See tips on Writing the Release.)

Make sure your pitch, starting with the subject line on your email or headline on your fax, focuses on what's happening locally. News organizations in Minneapolis and St. Paul, for example, are unlikely to assign staff to stories that have nothing to do with Minneapolis or neighboring states. And even if your idea is local, the newspaper or TV station might overlook it if the subject line or headline doesn't state this specifically.

Example of a good headline to a news outlet in the Twin Cities: "Minnesota charities aid tsunami victims." Example of a headline that might be overlooked: "Aid for tsunami victims."

2. **GET TO THE POINT** and keep it short: Focus on what's new, trendy, unusual, contrarian, interesting, and of significance to the broadest numbers of people. News organizations also love stories that arouse deep emotions – love, sympathy, hate, fear, anger – feelings that people can identify with.

Don't start a release with a dissertation about your organization. Do start it with the news.

3. **HORN IN ON THE BIG STORY.** When the tsunami hit, armies of non-profits, corporations and individuals pitched in. Newspapers and TV stations ran stories about local and national fund drives and published or aired lists of groups that were conducting them. We did stories about Girl Scouts who sold cookies to benefit the fund drives. Business editors assigned reporters to do stories about corporations that matched employee

contributions. The story built on itself. When the fund drives began to take in too many non-cash contributions such as clothing, that led to another round of stories.

Bottom line: News organizations developed many of these stories off of news releases issued by the non-profits, corporations, and others involved.

4. **PUT AS MUCH DETAIL IN YOUR PITCH AS POSSIBLE.** If you're conducting a non-profit event, for example, include at least the following in your news release: time, date, place, cost of admission, how to buy tickets and contact your organization, deadlines for purchasing tickets, who the event is benefiting, what the proceeds will be used for, how much you want to raise, and what's going to happen at the event.

If you have arranged for a prominent speaker, or there's anything else that's remarkable about the event, such as entertainment, mention that prominently.

If you think your local news organizations would be interested in interviewing your speaker, you should set aside time in the agenda for media availability. Follow that up with a call to the news organization, offering time with the speaker.

5. **THINK WITH YOUR SENSES.** Again, good stories and good "art" (pictures and graphics) make for good play. Pictures and sound are particularly important if you're trying to get your story on TV or radio. If there's anything that's particularly visual about your story, include that in your pitch and be ready to help news organizations arrange what's necessary. If your church is preparing holiday dinner at a homeless shelter, for example, offer to allow photographers into the kitchen and dining room and help arrange interviews with some of the customers and volunteers.
6. **SEND ART WITH THE RELEASE.** If your release quotes somebody extensively, include a picture of that person. If sending it electronically, call ahead to the news outlet to find out how the picture should be formatted. Another option: Instead of sending photos or graphics, you can include a link to your organization's web site. Include permission to use art off the web site. Make sure the art can be reproduced in large enough size.

7. **SCHEDULE A NEWS CONFERENCE** if you think your news will generate or warrants significant media attention. (See tips on News Conferences and Demonstrations.)
8. **DIRECT YOUR PITCH TO A SPECIFIC REPORTER OR EDITOR** who is in charge of a “beat,” or a subject of expertise. If you’re unsure, call the news outlet, explain the story, and ask for the names of who you should direct your pitches to. Additionally, the web sites of most news outlets include names and titles of key editors. If you’re still unsure, address your pitch to “City editor,” if sending it to a newspaper, or “News director” or “Assignment editor” at TV or radio stations. If you know your story is of interest to a specific specialty department, such as business, entertainment or sports, you should direct your story pitch to those editors and reporters. You can also use local media guides for your research; availability depends on your market.
9. **HOW TO SEND IT.** If you’re looking for immediate attention, send it via email or fax and follow up with a phone call. See more later on tips for calling your news outlet with a story idea.
10. **GIVE US TIME TO GET THERE.** If you’re holding a news conference, give us one or two days’ notice, if possible. Weekday mornings are best. The later in the day, the more pressing the deadlines. Nighttime events make it difficult for newspaper reporters to meet deadlines for the next day’s paper. However, if your event is visual, such as a public demonstration, consider holding it in the evening when local TV news is airing, so the event can be carried live. In general, in any news organization, staffing is light on weekends, making it difficult to cover anything but the most pressing and interesting stories.
11. **BE READY.** If you issue a news release, you or somebody else in your organization should be readily available to answer calls from the news media about it, particularly if you believe the news is strong enough to merit immediate daily coverage. If your event requires a ticket for admission, be ready to sell tickets once you put out your news release. If your event is a speech, have copies of it for reporters. If you are publicizing a service, be ready to respond to demand for it. If you are calling attention to your controversial stand on an issue, be prepared

to deal with opposition. Good reporters will present opposing viewpoints on any controversial topic. If television news is interested, make sure you have an articulate, succinct spokesperson. Time allotted for live interviews is typically less than two minutes, and there's no chance to do it over again.

12. **AVOID BIG NEWS DAYS**, unless you're trying to horn in on the big story.
13. **IF YOUR EVENT IS SPONSORED** by a newspaper or TV or radio station, other media outlets might not want to cover it. There are exceptions, of course, for major events. Competing newspapers or stations might show up, but will probably try to avoid taking pictures or shooting tape of anything that has a competitor's logo on it.
14. **FORGE RELATIONSHIPS WITH EDITORS AND REPORTERS**. This can be particularly fruitful if your organization has an ongoing need to be in the newspaper or on TV. At the newspaper, call up the beat reporter who covers your organization, and offer to meet for coffee or lunch. If there is no beat reporter, call the city editor and offer the same. At the TV station, call up the assignment editor and offer to stop by for a meeting. Often, television people don't have time to leave the station for meetings. Offer up opportunities for the TV station to have some archive footage inside your organization, for future use.
15. **BE PERSISTENT AND FOLLOW UP**. Remember, news organizations can receive thousands of pitches every day. It's okay to follow up your pitch with a call to see if the editor or reporter received it, and to press your case. Don't be discouraged or argumentative if your idea doesn't fly. Your local newspaper and TV station might turn it down today simply because the staff's time is taken up by other assignments. Be persistent. Be positive. Look for more ways to pitch your organization to the news media.

WRITING THE RELEASE: JUST THE FACTS, MA'AM

Step into a newsroom on any day, and you'll hear editors and reporters swapping stories about great PR pitches and bad ones we've seen. We get great ones and ineffective ones every day.

Here's a true example of a very productive pitch:

The day after an on-court brawl involving basketball players and fans during a Detroit Pistons–Indiana Pacers game, an Internet web hosting company in Bedford, Texas, offered a \$10,000 contract to the first person involved in the fight who agreed to be tattooed with the hosting company's logo. The company issued the release late in the afternoon. The chief public relations man called the local newspaper's business editor minutes later to pitch the story and offer up his CEO for an interview. The story garnered national exposure, and the web hosting company was pleased, even though the news media extensively quoted people who criticized the promotion. "Hey, any press is good press," the PR man told the editor later.

But for every idea that works, there are many others that don't fly or are pitched badly.

Here's an example:

Another company issued a news release in the morning, announcing plans for a distribution center at unspecified location in the Dallas–Fort Worth area. The release did not disclose the specific site, not even the city, even though the company had completed its deal and was ready to announce details. It turned out the omission of the location was inadvertent. Worse, the only person who

was authorized to give interviews was traveling and unavailable most of the day. Reporters wasted an entire day pursuing a story that they could have handled in a few hours.

What made one of these pitches effective, and the other bad?

In the former, the web hosting company figured out a creative way to horn in on the big story. Although he put the pitch out late in the day, the company's PR man called immediately to alert the media to it. He knew who to call locally, because, as a longtime PR specialist in his market, he'd spent years cultivating relationships with reporters and editors in the market. He was prepared to put his chief executive on the phone immediately. The company was prepared for the criticism it was about to take and probably knew the controversy would require the media to devote more space and time to the story, which the company viewed as positive. Finally, the company knew that local coverage equaled potential national exposure, because the hometown newspaper's story would likely be carried by wire services.

In the latter case, the second company forgot to include the most important fact – the location of the distribution center – in its release. Then, compounding the error, the company authorized only one person to handle interviews, and that person was unavailable. Because of the newsworthiness of the release, the company still got media exposure. But it seriously damaged its credibility with us. The company should have known its story was worthy of immediate attention by the news media and been prepared to handle the calls.

So, how do you write the most effective pitch? Here are some tips:

1. Type your release on standard letter size paper, and, if available, use your organization's letterhead with name, address, and phone number.
2. At the top, date the release.
3. If you want to encourage an immediate response, put "For immediate release" underneath the date.
4. Under the date, include the name and phone

number of a person who can be contacted immediately for further information.

5. Write a four to six-word headline summarizing your story. Example: “Minneapolis charity aids tsunami victims.”
6. Begin the text of the release with the most important and interesting information. Your first sentence should be able to stand alone as a summary to the story. Address the “5 Ws and H” – who, what, when, where, why and how – quickly.
7. If you’re experiencing writer’s block, try listing all the pertinent facts in order of importance. Then write as if you were speaking to another person.
8. Write simply.
9. Don’t assume the news organization knows your organization. State who you are and what you do. If you include names of people in your release, identify them by occupation or position in your organization.
10. Double-check your facts.
11. Try to keep your release to a page or two.

Here’s an example of a hypothetical set of facts and one possible simple pitch.

THE FACTS: The Minnesota Architecture League is holding its major annual fundraiser, Architecture by the Lakes, 7:30 p.m. Sept. 1, 2005, at the Hyatt Regency Minneapolis. Proceeds will benefit the acquisition budget of the Minnesota Architecture Museum. Social hour will begin at 7:30 p.m. and dinner will be served at 8:30 p.m. Individual tickets cost \$250. Tables of 10: \$2,000. Daniel Libeskind, chief architect for the complex that will replace the World Trade Center in New York, will speak on how to manage political interests in designing a high-profile project. News media availability for Mr. Libeskind, 5 p.m. Sponsors include ABC Corp. DEF Corp., and GHI Corp. The fundraiser is expected to raise more than \$2 million from sponsorships and ticket prices.

Here's how you could write the release:

Aug. 17, 2005

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Information: Jimmy Jones,
Minnesota Architecture League,
(555) 555-5255

MINNEAPOLIS -- Daniel Libeskind, architect of the complex that will replace the World Trade Center in New York, will be featured speaker during the Minnesota Architecture League's annual Architecture by the Lakes dinner Sept. 1 at the Hyatt Regency Minneapolis.

Proceeds from the dinner, which is expected to raise more than \$2 million, will benefit the acquisition budget of the Minnesota Architecture Museum.

Mr. Libeskind will speak on how to manage political interests in the development of high-profile projects.

"Daniel Libeskind is one of the most sought-after architects of his generation," said Jenny Johnson, executive director of the Minnesota Architecture League. "We're honored that Mr. Libeskind volunteered his time for the Minnesota Architecture League."

Individual tickets are \$250. Tables of 10 can be reserved for \$2,000. Information: the Minnesota Architecture League, (555) 555-5555.

Social hour will begin at 7:30 p.m., and dinner at 8:30 p.m.

Sponsors include ABC Corp., DEF Corp., and GHI Corp.

The Minnesota Architecture League, a 501(c)(3) non-profit, benefits the Minnesota Architecture Museum.

Information: Jimmy Jones, Minnesota Architecture League, (555) 555-5255.

Media availability: Daniel Libeskind will be available for news media interviews, 5 p.m., Suite 555, Hyatt Regency Minneapolis. Photograph of Mr. Libeskind available from Minnesota Architecture League.

Why is this release potentially effective? It provides all relevant detail about the event. It recognizes that the news media will be interested in Libeskind, a compelling national figure, and offers availability. It includes a quick quote from the organization's executive director. It provides a media contact and an easy way to obtain a photograph of Libeskind.

Let's take this another step. The Minnesota Architecture League could create a media kit deliverable by courier to news organizations on the day of the release. It could include fact sheets on the Minnesota Architecture League and Minnesota Architecture Museum, Daniel Libeskind, and the fundraising dinner, and copies of previous media stories about the architecture league, museum, and Libeskind. The Architecture League could also subsequently provide a text of Libeskind's speech to reporters. As far as the photograph goes, many news organizations would use it as long as it is of high quality. Others would prefer to shoot their own.

On the night of the event, the Architecture League and museum should also ensure that the hotel provides technical facilities for the media, as well as an individual liaison for reporters.

Some specific guidelines for photographs: Again, if emailing, call the news outlet first to see what kind of format is acceptable, and whether black and white or color is preferred. If sending by snail mail or courier, sandwich them with cardboard or other thick paper to prevent bending or mutilation. Don't expect photos to be returned. Standard headshots are acceptable by most media for use as small mugs. Group shots or pictures of people shaking hands generally are significantly less worthy of use in the paper. Type the names and titles of people in the pictures, from left to right, and tape to the back of the pictures. Also include the name of the person, company or organization that the photograph should be attributed to.

NEWS CONFERENCES AND DEMONSTRATIONS

There are instances in which you'll want to do more than issue a news release. To call attention to unsafe housing conditions in your community, for example, you may want to hold a news conference or rally at the site.

News conferences are convenient, because they let you or your spokesperson talk to all news media at once. This can be especially useful for breaking stories, when your spokesperson doesn't have time to answer individual calls from reporters throughout the day.

Another advantage of news conferences is that they sometimes force news outlets to cover your story out of fear that their competition will get the story. News conferences are also visual in nature, and useful for television news.

Public demonstrations – rallies, pickets, sit-ins and the like – are essentially more dramatic forms of news conferences. Because they are direct and visual, they are more likely to be covered, particularly by TV outlets. They also provide sources for human interest interviews.

However, some of the same risks in holding news conferences apply. Overuse lessens the chance they will be covered in the future and can create bad relations with news outlets.

The same guidelines for news conferences also apply to demonstrations. Be sure to send a news release in advance.

In most cases, however, your story pitch probably won't warrant a news conference. You're more likely to end up making a pitch directly to a reporter or editor.

CALLING IN STORY IDEAS

1. **IF YOUR STORY ISN'T "BREAKING"** – that is, is not happening within hours of your call – then write a letter, email, or release to the reporter or editor first. It's much easier to sell an idea in writing, and much easier for a reporter or editor to evaluate it. Like any effective correspondence, the letter should get to the point immediately and should be factual.
2. **IF YOU'VE SENT IN A RELEASE**, then pick the right time to call. Newspapers and TV stations typically have news meetings in the mornings and mid-afternoon, say, around 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. or 3 p.m. Try to avoid those times, particularly if you're calling about a story that isn't "breaking" that day. Also, the later in the day at a newspaper, the more likely it is the editors and reporters will be on deadline and will have less time to talk. At TV stations, reporters don't like to answer calls on non-breaking stories within an hour and a half before newscasts.
3. **BE PREPARED** to demonstrate why your story is newsworthy.
4. **FIND OUT** which reporter or editor is most likely to cover the story. This is the person you should call. If the reporter or editor thinks the idea is good but she can't cover it, she will probably pass it to a colleague who can.
5. **PRACTICE** 30- or 45-second pitches before you call. When you call, get to the point. Immediately state who you are and why you're calling, and mention that you sent a letter earlier. If leaving a voice mail message for an editor or a reporter, give your name and return phone number first, then leave a succinct summary of why you're calling. This ensures that the reporter has your contact information, even if she has to cut away from your message.

TIPS ON BEING INTERVIEWED

1. If the interview is scheduled for several hours or days later, ask the reporter what the story's about, what questions she might ask you, and how detailed you will have to be in your responses. This will help you prepare.
2. It's okay to ask in advance for questions via email, but don't try to use email to replace an interview a reporter is asking for. Most reporters want to engage their interview subjects in the give-and-take of a conversation. It's too easy to use email to give limited answers, and that can frustrate the reporter and possibly lead him to drop you out of his story, if you're not essential to it.
3. Do your homework. Prepare evidence and examples. Be prepared for all possible questions. If you're caught off guard by a question in an interview, don't attempt to answer it off the cuff. Tell the reporter you don't know the answer, and offer to get the information later.
4. In the interview, state your key points first. Be concise.
5. To increase your chances of being quoted, engage in a conversation with the reporter. Cite interesting examples involving real people.
6. Honesty is the best policy. If you can't answer a question, say so. Don't be vague, and, above all, don't lie! Vague or dishonest answers will hurt your credibility with the reporter and his editor, particularly if that bad information appears in print or on the air. Vague and dishonest answers will also hurt your credibility with everybody who knows the truth. This could include your employees, vendors, customers, shareholders, attorneys, bankers, accountants, business partners, and even family and friends. Vague answers also increase the likelihood that the story will be imprecise and possibly inaccurate.

7. Don't assume the reporter knows anything about the topic. If you're not sure the reporter understands the key points, restate key points for emphasis. Volunteer important information that the reporter hasn't asked about.
8. If the interview is on TV, look at the reporter, not at the camera. Before you sit down for your interview, check to see that your hair is neat, your face is not shiny, and your jacket, shirt and necktie don't have small patterns that will look bad on air.

CONTROLLING THE STORY: ASK FOR AN EDITORIAL BOARD MEETING

Do you have a big story to tell, and want some control over when it will be published? Seek a meeting with the editorial board of your local newspaper. This may or may not be difficult, depending on traditional practices in your market, and how much weight you carry with the news organization's senior executives.

In smaller markets, the publisher might be the go-to person. In larger markets, the board might be managed by a senior news executive who reports to the publisher. Usually, the people who run the editorial page do not report to the editors who run the newsroom.

If the board agrees to a meeting, you might be able to negotiate an "embargo" date – the time at which the newspaper can publish the information, or even conduct independent reporting based on it – in exchange for access to the information and your organization's executives during the meeting. The newspaper's editorial writers and the reporters and editors who cover your organization will likely be in attendance.

What's the upside for you? It enables you to control the flow of information, assuming there are no leaks.

What's the downside for you? Because you've given the news organization more time to research the story, it's possible the resulting coverage will be more critical. Also, the more people who know the information, the more likely it is that the story will leak to a competing news organization that isn't bound by your embargo. Once the leak occurs, the news organization that got burned might move forward with reporting the story immediately. News organizations are less likely to agree to an embargo with your organization if you've been unable to prevent leaks on previously negotiated agreements.

You can also try and negotiate an embargo with specific reporters and editors without seeking an editorial board meeting. News organizations have varying policies regarding who can agree to these kinds of deals.

On any offer of an embargo, reporters and editors will weigh several factors, including: the value of the information and access, the need to publish it immediately, the possibility of getting the information from other sources, the likelihood that the story will leak to competing news organizations, and the credibility of the organization that's offering the information.

Many news organizations won't accept embargoes, out of fear of having their news content controlled by sources. But many other news organizations will accept an embargo, believing advance notice of the news will allow them to organize a more complete report.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

These are by far the quickest, easiest and most widely used method for ordinary citizens to get their ideas published. Most newspapers, including the large metropolitan dailies, are quite eager to publish them, particularly because readership studies indicate they are very popular with readers.

Here are some tips for writing letters:

1. Include your name, address and phone number, because few papers will run anonymous letters.
2. Keep your letter short and to the point.
3. Make your letter newsworthy. It can be on any topic that's of interest to readers; it doesn't have to be in response to a story the paper has just run.
4. A catchy, humorous letter can be more effective and more likely to run than a straight, dry one.
5. Stick to the facts and the issues, and avoid personal attacks.
6. If you're responding to something the paper has just published, write promptly to increase the chances your letter will be published.
7. Avoid sending the same letter to more than one publication. Opinion pages editors are less likely to run letters that have already appeared in other publications.
8. Check your paper's opinions page for the proper way to address letters and send them.

UNFAIR OR INACCURATE COVERAGE

Reporters, like other human beings, aren't perfect. We make mistakes and if those mistakes are due to inaccurate, biased or incomplete reporting, our editors want to know. If you believe a story has been mishandled, here are some suggestions on how to lodge complaints:

1. Determine exactly what's wrong with the story. Is it inaccurate, biased, or incomplete? Prepare evidence to back up your argument. You might want to suggest other sources that would provide a more complete, accurate account.
2. Call the reporter first. State your problem, but don't assume the reporter was at fault. It could have been the fault of one of the editors who handled the story.
3. If you believe the story was inaccurate or misleading, ask for a correction or clarification. News organizations are willing to use them. Some have appointed readers' advocates – traditionally called ombudsmen – whose job it is to receive and assess complaints.
4. You can write a letter to the editor or guest editorial to the newspaper. If the problem was with a TV station, you can ask to go on the air.
5. If these methods fail and you believe the problem is recurring, you can call the city or supervising editor, managing editor, executive editor, or publisher at the newspaper. You can also call the ombudsman, if the paper has one. At TV stations, try the news director or station manager.

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS: FREE ADVERTISING

Most television and radio stations offer public service announcements – commonly referred to as PSAs – at no cost to non-profit organizations. PSAs are scheduled in commercial inventory and typically are 10, 20, 30 and 60 seconds in length.

If you're producing your own public service announcement, it's best to contact the station you're interested in and ask them for their public service announcement policy prior to producing your spot. The contact is usually the community affairs or community relations director. Policies vary between stations and typically vary between radio and television. Most PSA policies are located on the station's web site.

Screening: All public announcements will be screened by the station prior to being placed into the rotation.

Quality: Each spot aired must be produced to conform to commercial television broadcast standards. Subject matter must be presented in good taste. Public service announcements must address issues of local concern or promote causes that will enhance the quality of life in the community.

Public service announcements are only available for organizations that are tax-exempt. It is wise to provide proof of your organization's tax-exempt status when submitting the PSA.

Most television stations accept public service announcements on DVC PRO and Beta SP broadcast videotape. However, some use DVD and other formats, so it is best to contact the station before producing your PSA and find out what format is best for submission. If more than one public announcement is being submitted for airing, put all versions on one tape.

Once you qualify, plan to submit your script or tape at least 60 days prior to the first day you would like it to be broadcast. Keep in mind that the sooner the station receives the information, the better chance it has of getting on the air. Also, regarding radio, allow extra time in case the station may want to make corrections or offer suggestions for improvement of the material submitted.

As a general rule, copy should consist of 10-, 20-, 30-, and 60-second spots. Again, check with the station prior to producing your spot to make sure they air the length you are producing.

When producing, include key facts about your program or activity. Keep sentences brief, clear, factual, and conversational. Check your announcement by reading it aloud, with a stopwatch. Never go over the allowed time. The content of the spot can be creative. Be sure to include who, what, when, where and why.

Here's a sample 20-second announcement for AAJA:

Learn about the news media and how to gain access to it. Attend 'Making Headlines,' Saturday March 22 at Sacramento City College, Room M-3. The workshop will include a panel discussion led by Sacramento area journalists. For more information, call the Asian American Journalists Association at 555-5555.

Beware of turning your public service announcement into a commercial. For example, do not mention commercial, for-profit companies in video or audio unless approved by the station. Again, your best course of action is to find out the PSA policy prior to producing your spot. Most stations will include their PSA policy on their web sites.

If you are interested in a station producing your public service announcement and sponsoring your event, contact the station at least two to six months prior to your event with your proposal.

SPONSORSHIPS: STRETCH YOUR GROUP'S REACH

Another way to expand your message is to try and seek sponsorship for your organization from local media outlets. Sponsorships can bring free advertising and a big boost in credibility that comes with being backed by the local paper or TV or radio station.

First, do your research.

What kind of organizations do your local news outlets sponsor? This obviously varies by market. Broad categories can include civic, educational, health and human services, arts and cultural, religious, social, and environmental. Newspaper and television probably won't sponsor an event that already has a competing print media sponsor. And news outlets might shy away from sponsoring organizations that have controversial agendas.

Does it matter whether your group reaches a lot of people?

Not necessarily.

We're certainly interested in sponsoring groups or events that allow us to reach a large number of potential subscribers and viewers. But even if your event doesn't reach a lot of people, we might be interested for other reasons. If your organization reaches minorities, for example, backing it might help the news outlet fulfill its goal of fostering diversity. If you have a small struggling arts organization and your local paper likes to back the arts, you might get the news organization to help.

It might also help your cause if the news outlet has employees who use your product or service. Perhaps more importantly, it can help if high-ranking executives at the local news outlet are personally interested in your cause. If the publisher of your paper is diabetic, for example, that may increase the likelihood that she will be interested in having the newspaper back diabetes research.

Now, start looking for the people who dole out sponsorships at your news outlet.

At a small paper, the publisher might hold the strings. At a large newspaper, multiple executives might have control. The marketing director might be responsible for sponsorships broadly, but a vice president might control a pot of cash that he can use to buy tickets to a non-profit dinner. In any case, it's not likely that the editors and reporters have any control over sponsorships. In television, it will probably be the community affairs department that has control of on-air and cash sponsorships. To find out who holds the strings, try your news outlet's web site. Or, you might have to call or send an email.

When you find out who controls sponsorships, get information on deadlines and application procedures.

Now you're ready to make your pitch.

Start with a simple letter that quickly introduces yourself, your organization, what it does and who it benefits, and what you want from a sponsorship. Make sure you detail how many people your group benefits with its programs, particularly ones who live in the circulation area of the newspaper or service area of the television station. If you already have a fact sheet about your organization, include it in your pitch. Also include a copy of your non-profit 501(c)(3) letter. If your news outlet requires an application form, get a copy of it and include that with your package.

Then, mail, email, or fax it to the people in charge of sponsorships at your news outlet. It's okay to follow that up with a phone call.

Here are some things you should be prepared to offer if you're seeking, say, sponsorship for your charity dinner:

1. Exclusive print or TV sponsorship. Most newspapers, for example, won't want to sponsor an event if a rival paper or magazine is already a sponsor. The same goes for TV stations.
2. A table at the dinner.
3. Banner signage at the dinner.
4. The news organization's logo on programs and other giveaways, or even a free advertisement in the program.

5. A booth or exhibit space at the event, if that's appropriate.
6. The opportunity to distribute newspapers or sign up subscribers at the event, if appropriate.
7. First right of refusal for next year's sponsorship.
8. If your organization wants sponsorship for multiple events in, say, one year, submit a request that offers year-long benefits. Or, ask the news outlet to sponsor only the largest of the events.

Here's what you can seek from the news organization: Free advertising space or airtime. Many news outlets prefer space or airtime.

Even if you want cash, don't sniff at free advertising. The space or time carries a big cash value, and your organization should get a big boost in visibility and credibility from having the backing of the news outlet and space or time for advertising. Other sponsors may be more likely to sign up with your group if you have a media sponsorship. You'll have the opportunity to help design the advertising that the paper runs to promote your group or its event. You can use the ad to thank other sponsors. You can design it as a discount coupon.

Other tips to consider when approaching a news outlet for sponsorship:

1. You might get a heftier sponsorship if your organization is already a paying advertiser or offers to pay for some advertising. You might even get a discount on that paid advertising.
2. If your organization owes money to the news outlet for past advertising, that's likely an obstacle in asking for a sponsorship.
3. You shouldn't expect multi-year sponsorship agreements. News outlets are wary of these. Such agreements can frustrate the news outlet's own advertising representatives, who may be trying to sell ads to the non-profit group. A stable organization this year can become unstable over a lengthy sponsorship, leaving a news organization vulnerable. News organizations, like most givers, might be interested in nurturing your group along for a short time, but not for several years. And news organizations, like most givers, might want to

see the results of its sponsorship over a year before agreeing to another one.

4. Be aware of budget cycles at the news outlet you're pitching. If you need a sponsorship for next year, make your pitch, say, in August, when the news outlet is beginning its budget process for the next year. This is particularly important if you're asking for cash.
5. Don't be discouraged. Like ideas for news stories, news outlets can get hundreds of annual requests for sponsorships. If yours doesn't fly the first time, try again.

CLIMBING THE PUBLICITY LADDER: ONE NON-PROFIT'S STRATEGY

The Tarrant Area Food Bank is based in Fort Worth, Texas. It serves 280 agencies in 13 North Texas counties, funneling food and beverage to the hungry. It runs or helps coordinate several food and fund drives each year and distributes about 16 million pounds of food annually.

With a service area that large, what's the food bank's most effective means of reaching its target audience?

Its own newsletter.

The food bank publishes three newsletters per year, circulation 10,000 apiece, and a fourth, the agency's annual report. These go to donors, volunteers, and "name captures," people who might have bought a ticket to one of the food bank's fundraisers.

In the non-profit world, "mass media is actually the least effective way to reach your target audiences," says Andrea K. Helms, the food bank's longtime communications director.

Not that she isn't happy to get the exposure in the newspaper, or on radio or TV. The point is, Helms has a broad publicity strategy that doesn't start and end with getting into her local newspapers, and mass media is just a part of it.

"Any non-profit should utilize their local news media through PSAs and the occasional news or feature story," she says. "It helps create a background for a direct mail piece to a prospective volunteer or donor."

Besides newsletters, Helms uses a variety of tools to get publicity for the food bank:

1. **DIRECT MAIL.** The food bank mails out a general fund appeal each spring. The agency also operates a holiday card service, under which people make a donation and the food bank addresses and sends cards.
2. **WEB SITE.** Like other non-profits, the food bank maintains a robust web site. Helms promotes it on the agency's written materials. The site also links to America's Second Harvest, the national food bank of which the Tarrant food bank is a member. Lately, Helms has been looking for new ways to promote the site.
3. **RADIO.** "One of the most underutilized instruments of publicity is radio," she says. Of the mass media, it's easiest to target specific demographic groups using radio. She sends written PSAs to stations in her market, sends written scripts to stations that will accept it, and asks to appear on public affairs talk shows. Those are "the ones that air at 6 a.m. Sunday," she jokes. "But it's amazing how many people are awake at those hours."
4. **OUTDOOR MEDIA.** The food bank seeks sponsored advertising on billboards, buses, and bus stop benches. "Ideally, a non-profit would use all appropriate media to communicate to the general public and their specific audiences," she says.
5. **NEWS STORIES.** "Try to think like the editors and reporters," she says. For most regional mass media, that means stories that are local, new and meaningful. She admits to feeling obligated to send out a weak pitch from time to time, "but it's not one I call and follow up on." She does research into different departments at her local media and tailors pitches to editors and reporters she thinks might be most interested. In the largest local newspaper in her market, the food bank has appeared in stories and event listings in the metro and lifestyles sections, sports (food drives connected to athletic events), and society columns. Finally, Helms says, "I always thank the reporters and editors for any coverage that we get," usually by emailing them on the same day.
6. **MEDIA RESEARCH.** Non-profits can avail themselves of various local media directories,

depending on the market. The food bank subscribes to an annual directory called FinderBinder, www.finderbinder.com. It identifies reporters and editors by department in various local media outlets and is available in more than 15 markets nationally: Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Dallas–Fort Worth, Denver, Detroit, Outstate Michigan, Kansas and the Kansas City area, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Oregon, San Diego, San Francisco, St. Louis, Washington State, and Wisconsin. Prices vary by market, and the food bank pays \$150 annually for its subscription, which includes once-a-year updates. “It’s well worth it,” Helms says. “It’s a beginning base, and then you have to do your own updates.” If the price is hard to come by, “get a board member or somebody else to sponsor it,” she says.

7. MEDIA SPONSORSHIPS. The food bank obtains them from local newspapers and electronic media for fundraisers and food drives. It typically uses one half-page to three-quarter page newspaper ad to thank sponsors.

Above all, the food bank takes special care to hone its pitch, knowing it’s competing against multiple other non-profits for contributions and volunteer time.

“People love children,” she says, using one example. “People don’t like to think of children as being hungry.”

So the food bank hammers home the point that one third of the people who are living in extreme poverty in its service area are children. “You can’t promote everything about your organization,” Helms says. “You have to focus on a few things.”

JOURNALISTIC JARGON: A GLOSSARY

Media has a language all its own and it helps to understand the terms reporters and editors use when they're talking about stories. This is a partial list.

Ad: A paid advertisement. This compares to a non-paid news placement, which can be anything from a news story to a listing in a community calendar. Except for smaller news outlets, the advertising staff sells advertising, but generally doesn't direct the news content. Similarly, the news staff directs the news content, but doesn't sell advertising.

Angle: The focus of a story that makes it newsworthy.

Art: Pictures, illustrations, and informational graphics. If you're submitting a story pitch, consider proposing art with it. Good art and good stories usually mean good play.

Breaking news: A quickly developing story, such as the tsunami.

Budgets, budget meetings: Budgets are lists of stories that are being planned for publication. News organizations usually schedule a series of *budget* or *news* meetings throughout the day at which they decide what's going in the paper or on air.

Bureaus, zone offices: Suburban news offices in major metro areas. News organizations increasingly are opening bureaus to move reporters and editors closer to where their readers live. These bureaus are sometimes referred to as *zones*.

Centerpiece: A story and art in the middle of a newspaper page or web page.

City desk: Also sometimes referred to as the *assigning desk* or *metro desk*, this is the main newsroom in a news organization. It usually includes reporters who cover police, fire, city hall and other local governments, and schools.

Corrections, clarifications, retractions: When we're wrong, we publish corrections; clarifications, which might include details missing in the original story; and, in rare cases, retractions of entire stories, when the entire underpinning of the story is in question.

Cutline: Caption that accompanies a published picture and describes what's in the picture. If you submit a photograph, you should submit cutline information with it. Example: James Jones, executive director, Loaves and Fishes.

Deadline: Day and hour a news story must be in the hands of an editor or news director.

Display: Story and art.

Editor: A person responsible for the content and assignment of stories. For radio stations, the news director fills this function, for TV stations, the assignment editor.

Editorial: An expression of the opinions of a news outlet or individual. This compares to a standard news *story*, which is not an opinion. The same people (*editorial board*) who run the editorial pages of a newspaper generally do not run the news departments.

Features: Stories about people, organizations and companies that aren't necessarily tied to breaking news. The *features department* of a newspaper typically produces sections such as Life, Home, Food, Arts, Entertainment, and TV.

Five Ws and H: The six fundamental questions that journalists pursue: Who, what, when, where, why, and how. You should be prepared to address these questions in any pitch to a news organization.

Follow-up: These stories follow new developments in a story that's already been published or aired, or further develop an aspect of it that the reporter didn't fully pursue in the initial coverage. They're also called *folios*, or *next-day* and *second-day stories*. Example: Stories that are published after world relief efforts in the aftermath of the tsunami.

Guest column: Any opinion column published in any section of a newspaper that's written by somebody who doesn't work for the organization.

Head or headline: Title given a newspaper story or news release.

Lead (or sometimes, lede): The first sentence of a story, written to catch the reader's interest by telling the most important facts.

Mainbar: This is the lead story in a package of stories about the same topic. It's also called the *mainer*.

News release: A specialized letter that contains news.

Nut graph: Similar to *angle*, this is a paragraph or paragraphs in a complex story, usually placed very high, that encapsulates what's new and significant to readers or viewers. It's also sometimes called a *sweep* or *umbrella* graph. Sometimes, it's the *lead* of the story. It's what editors are looking for when they ask their reporters,

“Why do I care? Why am I reading this story?”

If you’re submitting a news release, you should consider adding a nut graph. It will help the reporters and editors quickly determine the significance of your story.

Ombudsman: Also sometimes called the *reader advocate*, this is the newspaper editor who takes complaints from readers and is responsible for communicating that information to the reporters and editors.

Public Service Announcement: Also referred to as PSAs. A free television or radio commercial publicizing non-political services and activities sponsored by non-profit groups.

Reporter: A person who gathers news and disseminates it through a newspaper, magazine, radio, television or online journalistic publications.

Sidebar: These are stories that accompany the mainbar in a package of stories about the same topic.

Source: Anybody or any organization that supplies information or news to a reporter.

Wire service: A news gathering organization, such as The Associated Press and Bloomberg News, that provides news to subscribing organizations.

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