

NATIONAL WIC ASSOCIATION

MEDIA TRAINING

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Making News
Messaging
Op-Eds & Letters to the Editor
TV & Radio
Q&A

MAKING NEWS

What is news?

News

noun /n(y)ooz/

- Newly received or noteworthy information, esp. about recent or important events
- Information not previously known to someone
- A person or thing considered interesting enough to be reported in the news

What are reporters looking for?

- Original research
- New polling or statistics
- Compelling personal stories
- Expert analysis on the news of the day

What makes a good pitch?

- **Timely:** Connect your pitch to a current event
- **Original:** Offer something nobody else has
- **To the point:** Keep it short, reporters are busy
- **Appropriately aggressive:** Follow-up but accept it if they pass
- **Lively:** Keep it interesting and link to relevant stories and videos

What can you do to get an interview?

- **Publish something** – Writing a letter to the editor or publishing an op-ed in a newspaper will establish you as a voice that's willing to speak out about a certain topic.
- **Volunteer for interviews** – If you work at an organization with a communications staff, let them know you are willing to give interviews. If you are working independently, call or email the newspaper, the local radio station or a TV network and let them know you are available for interviews. Most places have a central "assignment desk," which is the best place to start. Be prepared to explain your expertise in the subject area.
- **Take every chance you get** – Landing your first media interview can be the hardest. Many smaller outlets have to look harder to find interviewees. Jump at every opportunity and more will come your way.

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

Embargoes

- An embargo places a limit on when reporters can cover the release of information. An example would be embargoing a report until a certain time, or embargoing a statement until a speech has concluded.
- If an embargo is in place, no information should be posted online, on social media, or released by any media outlet until that time.
- If a reporter breaks an embargo it is a breach of journalistic ethics. In this case it is usually best practice to lift the embargo and release the information so all other reporters also have access to it.

Advance Copies

- One way to get reporters interested in an upcoming report is to provide them with an advanced copy.
- The advanced copy is almost always embargoed and sent to the few key reporters who are most likely to be interested.
- It's important to be careful about the timing of sharing advanced copies if you are also offering an exclusive.

Exclusives

- An exclusive is an offering of newsworthy information to one outlet for the initial release. News outlets like to be "first" and exclusives can help ensure a good placement for the story.
- When negotiating an exclusive, it is important to limit your discussion to one outlet at a time and keep a close hold on the report to ensure there is no release of information that would pre-empt the exclusive.
- Once the exclusive has been published, you can release the report or information to other outlets.

Deadlines

- The media operates on "deadline" – meaning they have a limited window of time in which to collect information.
- The best way to ensure you make it into a story or onto a TV show is by replying promptly to any media requests. If it's a reporter or producer we should be engaging with, try to call them back within 30 minutes of the initial request.
- The closer it gets to a reporter's deadline, the less likely it is that they will have room for new information.

Op-ed Submissions

- When working to publish an op-ed, it's critical that you submit it only to one news outlet at a time.
- If you don't get a timely response, email to let that outlet know you are moving on to another publication.
- Look online for the publication's specific rules for op-ed lengths and other submission guidelines.

TALKING TO REPORTERS

When speaking with journalists you will usually have a straightforward, on-the-record conversation. However, there are times when you might want to provide information without attribution or speak off-the-record. It's important to understand the terms and definitions used by journalists and know how to negotiate those terms.

On-the-Record: When you are speaking “on-the-record” everything you say can be quoted and directly attributed to you by name. If you are doing an interview with a journalist, it will be assumed that you are on the record unless you specify otherwise.

On Background: If you prefer to speak without attribution by name, you can ask to go “on background” with a journalist. It's important that when you do so you negotiate the terms for describing you as a source, and some publications require you to go give a reason for not wanting to speak on the record. For example, you might want to be “a person with knowledge of the education policy negotiations” or “an education expert who asked to speak on background due to the sensitivity of the issue.” Another related term that is less commonly used is “deep background,” meaning a journalist can use the information and pursue it, but not attribute it or directly quote it.

Off-the-Record: If you are speaking “off-the-record” with a journalist it should mean that nothing said will be used in their reporting in any way, nor will they pursue anything said in an off-the-record conversation. However, this term has become softer and many journalists will pursue information or use an off-the-record viewpoint to inform a story.

These rules are not interpreted the same by every reporter, so be prudent and explain what you mean when you go “on background” or “off-the-record.” Bloggers and reporters for non-traditional media might also not be as knowledgeable about the standard rules or as inclined to follow them.

And the most important rule to remember: ***if you don't want something to become public, just don't say it in an interview.***

MESSAGING

Message Strategy

- Work to combine your key lines with statistical data, research, policy solutions and anecdotes in a way that portrays your viewpoint and vision.
- Don't just think about covering your talking points or getting in a good sound bite.
- Know your core message and be ready to work it into your answer to any question.
- Use your core message in every interview, op-ed, letter to the editor, statement, presentation, etc.
- Think through the type of interview (for print? taped? live?) and what you know about the reporter (friendly to your message or not?) to determine the best way to get your message across.

Effective Messaging – The Five C's

- CLEAR: One central message, 3-4 key supporting points
- CONNECT: Always know your audience, who are they and why do they care?
- COMPELLING: Make it interesting or personal
- CONCISE: Give them a sound bite, make it easy to edit
- CONTINUAL: Repeat the message, it takes 7-12 times to have an impact

Getting to the Message - ATM

You aren't just giving the interview to answer questions; you are giving the interview to deliver your message. So to get there, follow ATM:

- **A**nswer
- **T**ransition
- **M**essage

Example Question: Is raising the minimum wage really the way to combat poverty? Aren't most people living in poverty just not working hard enough?

- **A**nswer: Like many Americans, I'm working a full time job but I'm still left struggling to meet the basic needs of my family...
- **T**ransition: Which is why...
- **M**essage: We need our policymakers to raise the federal minimum wage.

If you end your answers on message, you can push the conversation in the direction you want it to go.

OP-EDS AND LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Op-ed articles are a great way to reshape a public debate and affect policy. Letters to the editor also contribute to the public discourse. If you want to write a piece that will add to the debate and get published, see if it meets the OPTIC criteria...

Original – Are you writing something that’s fresh and different? Find a new way to make an argument, offer new research and make sure you are writing original content and not just quoting from what’s already out there.

Personal – Why are *you* the right person to provide this point of view? Don’t be afraid to offer personal insights and stories.

Timely – Why now? Finding a good news hook is often the key to getting a piece published. Think about why this piece is relevant now and see if you can work a current event into your piece.

Informative – Did the reader learn something? Make sure the reader comes away from your piece knowing more than they did before. Op-eds aren’t just a chance to rant or rave on an issue; they should enrich the reader’s knowledge.

Controversial/Counterintuitive – Are people arguing about this issue? Is my take on this unexpected? Writing about a hot issue, arguing an unexpected point of view, or co-authoring a piece with someone who the reader might not expect will help your piece stand out.

FORMULATING AN OP-ED FROM LEDE TO KICKER

The Opening

The first few paragraphs of the piece should express the point of the column and give the contextual 5 Ws (who, what, when, where, why)

Lede (2 sentences)

- Grab the reader's attention
- Give the five Ws

Position statement (1 sentence)

Quote (1 sentence)

- Backs up the call to action and adds legitimacy to your argument

The Nut

This section transitions your piece from "the lede" to "the rest" by putting your main point in context and answering the question "why do we care?"

Nut (1-2 paragraphs)

- Describe the urgency, size and scope of the issue and highlight what's to come
- "If you read no farther, you know what the story is about." ~Ken Wells, WSJ
- If the lead is a "close-up," the nut is a "wide-angle shot." ~Evelynne Kramer, The Boston Globe Magazine

The Rest

The bulk of your piece should expand your main point with evidence and statistics, quotes, anecdotes, and analysis

Expansion of call to action (3 -5 paragraphs)

Caveats (1 – 2 paragraphs)

- "To be sure...", acknowledge the other side's position and refute it

Recap and expansion of nut for maximum sweep (1 -2 sentences)

Kicker (1 sentence)

- Close your op-ed with an emphasizing quote or detail, or a call to action
- Consider echoing a phrase or theme from the lead

Chicago Sun-Times: Unemployment insurance saved me

BY Will Wilson March 23, 2014 10:54PM

More than 2 million Americans, myself included, have been thrown out into the cold by a gridlocked Congress that has yet to reinstate extended unemployment insurance.

I wasn't always a statistic. Twelve years ago I was free-lance graphic designer living in downtown Chicago and taking advantage of my two bachelor's degrees, leading an enjoyable life and earning enough to go on vacation every so often.

Then I was diagnosed with AIDS and my life changed forever. I was sick and went medically bankrupt. I have been underemployed or unemployed ever since, never making more than \$25,000 a year because my health care under the Ryan White Act limits the amount I can make and still receive the care I need. In other words, I signed up for unemployment insurance to stay alive.

While unemployment insurance helped me get by — using the very rudimentary meaning of “getting by” — I started to fall behind. Throughout the next decade I did all I could. I tried to pull myself up by my bootstraps, getting my health under control and taking odd jobs to stay afloat, all the while looking for better employment to help me crawl back into the life that I knew. But nothing came along.

When my unemployment insurance ran out over a year ago, it was a nail in the coffin for me. Within the next few weeks I was evicted from my house, and Blanche DuBois describes what happened next the best — I relied on the kindness of strangers to live. Without them I don't know where I would be. I stayed on friends' couches, sent my dogs away and swallowed my pride and applied for food stamps.

Getting by on the basics was no longer the goal; having a place to sleep was.

I am so grateful for my friends and my community who helped me get through those dark times. I learned from my Catholic education at an early age that giving back is important, and I take to heart the words “I am my brother's keeper.” That's why when the open enrollment period began for the Affordable Care Act last October, I volunteered to be a navigator, helping people sign up for an insurance plan that fits their family and their budget. By that time I had scraped enough money together to get back into my own place, and after working four months as an unpaid volunteer navigator, I am proud to say, I was hired by Enroll Lake County and I'm earning a paycheck. An aside: Enrollment ends March 31, Get Covered Now!

Too often politicians denigrate government programs such as unemployment insurance and say the recipients are lazy. This is as false as it is insulting. I was not sitting around and doing nothing when my life changed 12 years ago, and I am not sitting around doing nothing now. I have been blessed to be healthy enough to work most of the time since my AIDS diagnosis, and I want to work. And now that the possibility of being denied health insurance due to a pre-existing condition is illegal, it is my intention to find the best-paying job I can. I sought government assistance out of circumstance, not because of a lack of ambition.

Unemployment insurance did not give me back the life I knew, but it saved me. That is what it is there for, a safety net for those who need it.

The U.S. Senate should restore unemployment insurance to 2 million Americans quickly, and the House should waste no time in following suit.

Will Wilson lives in Gurnee and is a navigator for Enroll Lake County.

WRITING SUCCESSFUL STATEMENTS

1 person with the pen

When the decision is made to issue a statement, avoid the delays that come with having to merge multiple versions by immediately **determining one person to write the initial draft.**

1 voice

While several CAP experts maybe involved with a particular issue, **pick one expert to serve as the voice for the statement.** Statements issued by two or more people make it difficult for a journalist to include your quote in their story.

1 sentence that says it all

The goal of a press statement is to provide reporters with concise and quotable content from an expert reacting to something newsworthy. Increase the chances of getting your statement picked up by making sure there is **one sentence that presents the issue and our opinion.** *(See example sentence bolded in the statement on the next page.)*

1 tweet-able line

Make sure **one sentence in your statement can be boiled down to no more than 140 characters** in order to quickly and easily share a portion of your quote via Twitter. Remember to include a link back to your full statement in your tweet. *(See example tweet on the next page.)*

3 pm deadline

Unless your statement is reacting to late breaking news, **the deadline for issuing a statement is 3pm.** Anything issued after 3pm is too late to make it into that day's news cycle.

3 hours after news breaks

Statements providing a reaction to breaking news should be issued as soon as possible, and **no later than 3 hours after the breaking news is first reported.**

TIPS FOR TV & RADIO

Before you are booked

- **Be ready and available** – TV and Radio reporters have firm deadlines and it's important to be accessible if you think you might get booked.
- **Ask and answer questions** – Often a TV or radio booker will want to “pre-interview” a guest. Be ready to answer questions, and don't be afraid to ask. Make sure you are comfortable with the subject and the format. For example, is this a taped an edited interview or will it be live?

When on air

- **Dress for TV** – Some studios will have wardrobe requirements, such as avoiding a certain color. Ask about any restrictions. You will also want to avoid small patterns of stripes or checks. Solid dark colors, beige and light pastels are usually best.
- **Know where to look** – Depending on the setting you might have to stare straight to camera, stare straight at a reporter, or ignore all cameras and have a casual conversation on set. Don't be afraid to ask for specific instructions on where to look and where not to look. Looking around or at the wrong place can come across awkward or shifty.
- **Stay focused and on topic** – If you have a message to get across, lead the questions back to your central point. And if you are asked something that you don't know about, don't be afraid to admit it and move the discussion back to what you do know about.
- **Use statistics and language carefully** – Statistics are good to drive a point home, but don't overwhelm an interview with too many. Try to keep your stats local and relatable. Also make sure you are speaking in casual language that any non-expert can understand. This means no jargon and no acronyms.
- **Be energetic** – For radio, it's particularly important to vary your voice and avoid coming across as monotone. Be energetic and don't argue unless the format calls for it. Most importantly: smile!

After you're done

- **Stay put** – Sometimes a camera will linger for a moment before going off-air, or a radio host might have to do a quick throw to commercial. Don't move until you're given the all-clear.
- **Record and critique your interviews** – Watch your interviews back and look for ways to improve for next time.
- **Always be gracious** – Being easy to work with is the best way to get invited back.