



Spreading the word through internet, print, television, and radio news outlets is a great way to change minds about important issues. But if you don't interact with journalists effectively, you could waste a lot of time or worse, do more harm than good.

## HOW AND WHY TO CONTACT THE PRESS

### USE A NEWS PEG

If you want to pitch a story about your cause to the news media you need a news peg, something about your work considered newsworthy. Generally, this will either be about a currently popular story, or about something your organization is doing.

Tying your pitch to an event in the news—local, national, or international—is probably the most effective way to get news coverage. Reporters are often looking for ways to put an issue in context and advance it past what other news outlets are reporting. For example, you may be able to tie a national story to how it impacts your local community.

Being the first to bring a story to the press is particularly effective, as you can help shape how the story is discussed. Usually, this will be directly tied to work your group is doing, for example having a successful petition; getting an interesting [FOIA response](#); or finding a security issue in popular software

Another reliable news peg may be an [event you are organizing](#). Make sure that the event is at a convenient time and place for reporters to show up before inviting them, ensure you have a good turnout from your team, and create strong visuals. Be clear in your event expectations and [community guidelines](#) that you expect media coverage. A perk of inviting reporters is that those who show up are the right audience for your work, and you can prioritize them in future outreach.

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## THE PITCH

### Whom to pitch to

Identify a news outlet or specific reporters who cover similar stories to your pitch. The best bet is to focus on local media outlets, like city newspapers or blogs, college radio stations, community event calendars or your local news weekly.

Always send an email to the general “news tip” email address that most outlets include on a “contact us” webpage as well as specific reporters. Don’t send to ALL the reporters — only the reporters and editors who work on the beats/areas to which your pitch pertains.

If you’re pitching to a TV station, find contact information for the assignment desk and for individual assignment editors, assignment managers, and news directors — they generally decide what gets covered, not the reporters.

Sending an email is usually preferred, but for sensitive stories, many journalists also publicize their Signal contact information. Often if the pitch is outside of the reporter’s usual beat, they will refer you to a colleague or other outlet. Keep a record of who gets back to you and covers your work, and keep this outreach targeted to a small group based on the story. As you build these relationships it will be easier to get the right story to the right reporter.

## Writing the pitch

Reporters receive a deluge of sloppy pitches. Keep yours concise and include [a few important points](#):

- **Impact:** Make it clear who is implicated in the story, and to what extent they’ll be affected.
- **Timeliness:** Why now? What makes this story unique and new compared to past coverage?
- **Prominence:** Who and/or what are well known in this story? i.e. specific politicians, government agencies, businesses.
- **Proximity:** Essential for local outlets, how does this story impact the local community?
- **Conflict:** Be clear about who is wronging whom and why are you doing something about it.
- **Human Interest:** Including a narrative about individuals can make an abstract or technical story more appealing to a broad audience.

Not every pitch will have all of these elements, but if you manage to include most of them with just a few clear sentences each, you will have an effective pitch.

If you have decided to  [organize an event](#), you should post a [media alert](#) on the web before pitching, which includes the basics: title of action, where, when, what reporters will see, contact information for organizers, and some links to your work. Keep it easy to read quickly by avoiding excessive graphics or design elements. You can see example releases from EFF on our [press contact page](#).

## Examples

Here’s an example of an email you might send to a reporter when the peg is a story that’s currently being covered in the news.

*“Subject: Your story on tech and small business and another big problem that’s looming*

*Hey Bob,*

*I saw that you wrote about how technology is impacting small businesses and really enjoyed it. So I thought you might be interested in another angle here, which is how international treaties supported by our Senator will make local consumers less secure.*

*My group works on these issues, and we have an expert who would love to talk about what’s going on right now: secretive trade negotiations that could create global rules that hurt small business. For example, the business you mention could be forced to stop adding upgrades to customers’ tablets and cell phones, opening them up to security exploits.*

*There’s more information here [URL to a blog post or something else on your website—not your home page!]*

*Please reach out if you’d like to talk more.”*

**\*\*\* In your signature line, include complete contact information for yourself (with a title if you have one), and your organization.**

Here’s a sample email to send to the press to alert them about your event:

*“Subject line: Local event on dangerous international treaty that hurts consumers everywhere*

*Hey Bob,*

*I saw that you’ve covered how ill-conceived laws can hurt technology businesses, so I thought you’d want to know about our Anti-TPP flash mob at 10 am Saturday in front of the Big Corporation Building [URL].*

*TPP stands for Trans-Pacific Partnership, and it’s a secretive, multi-national trade agreement that threatens to extend restrictive intellectual property laws across the globe and rewrite international rules on its enforcement. You can see pictures from our last flash mob here [URL].*

*If you need any more information, just let me know.”*

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A REPORTER IS INTERESTED?

If a reporter responds to your email, answer any questions promptly and clearly. If you leave reporters hanging, you are telling them you are unprofessional and your tip isn't worth following up on.

Never imply that your email is an exclusive tip unless it is. If a reporter asks who else you pitched it to, you can be honest while encouraging coverage. For example:

- "I sent out a similar email to a number of other reporters, but I've heard from you first. I think this story is very important and under-covered."
- "I sent the email out to a number of other reporters. This story is very important and under-covered. Let me give you an example that you'd be particularly suited to writing about."

## HOW TO HANDLE A LACK OF RESPONSE OR INTEREST

- Stay positive, and professional, and email judiciously. In all your interactions with reporters, don't vent frustrations or spam them with follow-ups. The relationship you're building is more important than this specific story.
- If you emailed a reporter in response to news coverage and got no answer, don't resend the email. However, you should feel free to try again when there's a new story to respond to.
- If you emailed to *pitch an event to a broadcast*, you may follow up with a concise phone call or email about 24 hours before their air time. For print or websites, follow up with a second, shorter email alert.
- If reporters email you back to say some nice version of "*thanks but not this time*," make a note they are good reporters to email again for the next news peg.
- If reporters email you back to say "*please don't contact me again*" or give other instructions for pitching stories, follow their directions and note for next time.

## WHAT TO DO WHEN THE PRESS CONTACTS YOU

Whether your work is drawing media attention, or you've cultivated a good reputation among reporters, you'll start to get press inquiries. Keep the following in mind when preparing a response:

- Always focus on crafting **three points** you want to convey, and be concise on delivering them. Think about potential follow-up questions and how you'll answer those to pivot back to your main points.

## Phone calls

- Often the reporter will request a phone call, so rehearse these points. A lot. Roleplay with a friend and get comfortable saying them out loud and in response to different questions.
- Always assume that you are on the record and that everything you say is going to be quoted. If that makes you speak slowly and deliberately, all the better—it will give the reporter time to take notes and get clarification. It is tempting to add asides as you would in a friendly conversation, but these too can be quoted and dilute your message.
- Avoid explaining your opposition's perspective. Doing so risks the journalist misattributing that position to you by mistake.
- Often print/web reporters will ask to record the interview. Generally speaking, this is a good way to ensure that the reporter quotes you accurately. However, if the reporter does not broach the subject first, you should ask whether it will be recorded. When an interview is being recorded, be careful not to say anything off the cuff that you wouldn't like to be broadcast.
- Be comfortable with silence. Again, reporters are likely taking notes and will pause. Trying to continue in that space will only dilute your message.
- Don't worry about not having an answer. If something unexpected comes up in the discussion, you can always say you don't have a comment or you need to get back to them.

## Broadcast Interviews

- Know what you're getting into: If someone calls for a TV or radio interview, make sure to clarify if it will be live or taped, whether there will be any audience call-ins, and what the reporter or interviewer expects of you. In case of a live show, feel free to ask for tips and helpful hints. Ask for questions in advance. Try to watch the program beforehand.
- Whenever possible arrange the call when you know you will have a quiet and private place to record, and schedule some time to test for technical issues. Limit any surprises that may take your attention off the topic at hand.
- Dress in something that makes you feel confident and professional. It doesn't have to be a suit, unless that makes you feel relaxed and in control.
- Set dressing: For interviews with video recordings from your computer, take some time to establish better lighting and background visuals. You want your face to be lit from the front and less light behind you. Ideally use more diffused light sources, like a lamp with a shade, to light your face. As for the background, a few interesting but not distracting visuals are best. So instead of doors, a plain wall, or room clutter, try to have shelves, furniture, or artwork in your background.

As mentioned above, never leave reporters hanging. If there are any last-minute issues with a recording, be sure to communicate and when possible offer alternative arrangements or speakers. Even if you have a unique expertise, wasting a reporter's time will discourage them from reaching out again.

## AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Effective media strategy doesn't end with the phone call. You'll want to include some steps in your [social media strategy](#) to make this appearance as impactful as possible. As soon as you can after an article is published you'll want to do a few things:

- If you like it — or even if it's just okay — send a follow-up email thanking the reporter. This can be short, and including compliments doesn't hurt either if they are genuine.
- Follow up later with any new developments that you think might interest the reporter. But don't overdo it, or you will find you'll soon be ignored.
- Promote good coverage on your site or social media channels, optionally tagging the reporter or publication.
- If there are elements of the story that you don't like, you can politely provide clarifications or corrections in your thank-you message. For example, correcting spellings, pronouns, titles, etc. are often appreciated and happens much faster if you are cheerfully pointing something out.
- Only ask for a correction when there is a clear, factual error. **Do not** attack the angle, interpretation, perception, balance, or characterization. Impolite or subjective corrections not only will be less likely to be accepted but will sabotage the relationship of trust you are building with the reporter.
- If the coverage is very bad, it is often the best course of action to not draw any attention to it. While a public response or clarification is sometimes necessary, this will often bring more attention to the initial piece.
- Getting media is extraordinarily hard—be pleased with any progress that you make. If you don't get any coverage from your first few attempts at pitching the media, learn from your mistakes and try again!