



# **Advocacy Toolkit**

## **Media Advocacy 101**

Using Local and Social Media  
to Support Your Advocacy

**NRHC would like to thank Capital One for its generous support of this  
Advocacy Toolkit and our Local Media campaign.**



## Introduction

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### Focusing on local media is critical to advocacy efforts.

Building and sustaining strong relationships with your local media is one of the most effective things you can do to raise public awareness of your organization and to advocate for the issues you care about. Through local media, you can introduce a large and diverse audience to your cause and persuade them to become supporters. And, because Senators and Representatives pay close attention to what is happening in their districts, local media coverage can be quite effective in getting your message to them as well.

In this toolkit, you will find three ways use your local media to support your advocacy efforts. Those activities are:

- ◆ Pitching news stories that highlight your organization, the great work you do, and the issues you care about;
- ◆ Publishing an persuasive op-ed in your local newspaper; and
- ◆ Using Social Media to reach new audiences.

These actions are not the only ways to raise public awareness, but they do make up the core components of building power and influence within your community and on Capitol Hill. We hope these ideas will inspire you to begin to use your local media as a tool for raising your advocacy.

I would like to thank Capital One for its generous support of this Advocacy Toolkit, and for their commitment to improving access to affordable rural housing.

Thank you for your advocacy,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert A. Rapoza".

Robert A. Rapoza  
Executive Secretary



## Pitching a News Story

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Maintaining relationships with reporters is critical to gaining local media exposure. Remember, the more you can develop a reputation as someone who has accurate information, meets deadlines, and can provide interesting quotes or facts, the more reporters will rely on you for story ideas.

### Preparing to Pitch a Story

- ◆ Make news. Invite a reporter and your Members of Congress to visit your organization and to see the work you do up close. It's the perfect opportunity to build your relationships with the media and Congress.
- ◆ Target the right reporters. Contact your local newspapers and TV news programs or search online to find out which reporters work on issues relating to housing and community development, and how often they published articles on these topics.
- ◆ Do your homework. Before you make your pitch, read what the reporter has already written to ensure that your story idea is fresh, tailored to their interests, and relevant to their audience.
- ◆ Become a resource. Reporters work on extremely tight deadlines, so it is important that you provide them with all of the information they need to write the story. Remember to:
  - ◇ Create a press kit that includes press releases, fact sheets, reports, news articles, and background information on your organization and the issue;
  - ◇ Be prepared to provide quotes and interview opportunities; and
  - ◇ Volunteer your contact information and make yourself accessible 24/7.

### Making an Effective Pitch

- ◆ Tell a clear, concise story. You should be able to explain in 2-3 sentences why your story idea is important and of interest to your community.
- ◆ Frame the issue. Pitches must attract the reporter's attention and pass muster with their editors. Successful ones frame the issue as either new, exposing a conflict or controversy, as colorful and visual, having local appeal, focusing on a human interest story, involving strange bedfellows, or as timely.
- ◆ Make it personal. Put a human face on the issue by identifying someone in your community who can share their story about how it impacts them. Prepare a short handout with details about their story and photos, if possible.
- ◆ Get feedback. Ask the reporter whether they might be interested in covering your story idea. If not, ask them about which of their colleagues might be.

### What to Avoid

- ◆ When using email, avoid sending attachments that may set off spam filters and instead send reporters links to where they can find the information.
- ◆ Try not call reporters late in the day when they are on deadline. The best hours are between 10 a.m. and about 2 p.m.
- ◆ Don't wait until the last minute. Communicate with your local media as far in advance as possible.



## Publishing a Persuasive Op-Ed

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One of the best ways to gain visibility for your organization and the issues you care about is to submit a timely, persuasive op-ed to a local newspaper. Because Senators and Representatives pay close attention to what is happening in their districts, local media coverage can be quite effective in getting your message to them as well.

### Writing Your Op-Ed

- ◆ Make only one point well. Remember to focus tightly on only one issue or idea — in the first paragraph. Start with your strongest argument.
- ◆ Have a clear editorial viewpoint. Come down hard on one side of the issue. Don't equivocate.
- ◆ Be the voice of reason. Express your opinion, then base it on factual, researched, or first-hand information.
- ◆ Lose the stuffed shirt. Editors want to publish op-eds that are interesting to readers, so be candid and personable. Use conversational language and avoid jargon.
- ◆ Keep it brief. An op-ed should never be longer than 750 words. NEVER. Each newspaper has their own word-limits, so check first.
- ◆ Use short, punchy sentences.

### Make it Relevant

- ◆ Timing is everything, so jump at the right opportunities. Link your op-ed to an event or story that is dominating the news.
- ◆ Tell a local story. Make sure your op-ed relates broad, national issues to what's happening in your community. Op-eds are meant to stimulate public discussion and drive public debate.
- ◆ Use your op-ed to build your relationship with your Senators or Representatives. If they have been supportive of the issue, thank them for their leadership in the op-ed and forward a copy of the published op-ed to their office.

### Practical Tips

- ◆ Submit your op-ed with a brief bio, along with information about your organization, and your phone number, email address, and mailing address. Include a cover letter to briefly introduce your credentials and explain why the issue is important to their readers.
- ◆ When using email, avoid sending attachments that may set off spam filters. Instead send your op-ed in the body of the email.
- ◆ Don't be discouraged if your piece is not accepted. Rework your argument or approach the issue from another angle. Submit to another paper or wait for the right moment to pitch it again.



## Using Social Media To Reach New Audiences

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Social media sites — like blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and YouTube — present great opportunities to raise awareness of your organization, the work you do, and the issues you care about.

### Engage, Inform, and Recruit

- ◆ Remember, social media is only effective when you are interacting with your audience. That means you'll need to commit to posting new stories, connecting with new people, answering questions, and being engaged every day.
- ◆ Share content that encourages your supporters to act. Post inspirational stories, compelling photos, or ask an open question. Unlike traditional media, social media allows you to develop stronger relationships your supporters.
- ◆ Keep supporters informed about your work and recruit new supporters by posting on your accomplishments, announcements, volunteer opportunities, and events.
- ◆ Start small, but strong. It's far better to focus on one form of social media — and do it well — than to host multiple sites that are ghost towns.

### Creative Ideas

- ◆ Use Pinterest to share images of the families you help, volunteers, or before-and-after photos of the homes you build or rehab.
- ◆ Provide supporters with a place to share their own stories. Ask supporters to submit photos, stories, and other content. Ask open-ended questions that will draw supporters into sharing their opinions and perspectives.
- ◆ At your events, use a smartphone to record 15 second videos of your volunteers in action. Then, tweet them or post them to Facebook or your website.
- ◆ Give supporters a behind-the-scenes glimpse of your organization or a sneak preview of your projects. Introduce the people on your team that help make things happen.
- ◆ Post quotes from enthusiastic supporters or families you've helped about what your organization means to them, or why they decided to get involved in your cause.

### 3 Easy Tips

- ◆ Every time you post a photo, make sure to tag the people in it.
- ◆ Foster connections with supporters by responding to every question or comment that is posted.
- ◆ Have fun. Social media is an opportunity to connect with a community of people who appreciate what your organization does. Enjoy it.