

# ENGAGING WITH THE MEDIA

A COMPANION TO THE ADVOCACY  
TOOLKIT FOR INFLUENCING THE  
POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

PRODUCED BY DAVID THOMAS MEDIA LTD UNDER THE  
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**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT 2015**

Putting stakeholders at the core of post-Rio+20 processes

# AUTHORS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## ABOUT THE WRITER

David Thomas is a highly experienced broadcaster, trainer and manager. He has been involved in journalism and production for more than 30 years, mostly with the BBC World Service and local radio. His expertise has taken him all around the world, working with broadcasters from Eastern Europe, the Far East, Africa and the Caribbean. He set up his business (David Thomas Media Ltd) in 2005 to help improve communication skills, especially in NGOs and charities.

**CONTRIBUTORS:** Anna Coopman, Ian Fenn and Farooq Ullah, Stakeholder Forum.

**PRINT DESIGNER:** Faye Arrowsmith, [www.flogo-design.co.uk](http://www.flogo-design.co.uk).

## THE SD2015 PROGRAMME

This report is an output of the Sustainable Development 2015 (SD2015) programme, a multi-stakeholder engagement programme run by Stakeholder Forum and CIVICUS, in collaboration with UNDESA.

The SD2015 programme aims to increase stakeholder participation in the process to negotiate a new global framework to eradicate poverty through sustainable development, known as the post-2015 development agenda. SD2015 provides tools and opportunities for all stakeholders to input to this agenda and help build a more sustainable future, through five focus areas: raising awareness; increasing engagement; empowering stakeholders; coordinating advocacy; and strengthening governance.

SD2015 is undertaken with the financial support of the European Union.

See [www.SD2015.org](http://www.SD2015.org) for more information and resources.

## ABOUT THE SD2015 PROGRAMME PARTNERS STAKEHOLDER FORUM

Stakeholder Forum is an international organisation working to advance sustainable development and promote democracy at a global level. Our work aims to enhance open, accountable and participatory international decision-making on sustainable development through enhancing the involvement of stakeholders in intergovernmental processes.

Stakeholder Forum works with a diverse range of stakeholders globally on international policy development and advocacy; stakeholder engagement and consultation; media and communications and capacity building - all with the ultimate objective of promoting progressive outcomes on sustainable development through an open and participatory approach.

[www.stakeholderforum.org](http://www.stakeholderforum.org) / [info@stakeholderform.org](mailto:info@stakeholderform.org)

## CIVICUS

CIVICUS is a global network of civil society organisations and activists dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society around the world.

Founded in 1993 and proudly based in the global South, CIVICUS has members in more than 120 countries around the world, and has as its vision a worldwide community of informed, inspired, committed citizens engaged in confronting the challenges facing humanity.

CIVICUS works to strengthen civil society by monitoring, researching, analysing and influencing global events, processes and trends that impact civil society and by bringing civil society together to generate and share knowledge and to take action.

[www.civicus.org](http://www.civicus.org) / [info@civicus.org](mailto:info@civicus.org)

## UN DESA (SD2015 COLLABORATOR)

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) works closely with governments and stakeholders to help countries around the world meet their economic, social and environmental goals.

Within UN DESA, the Division for Sustainable Development (DSD) provides leadership in promoting and coordinating implementation of the sustainable development agenda of the United Nations, including support for the effective participation of Major Groups (as defined in Agenda 21) in the UN political processes and its analytical and capacity development work.

United Nations Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform:  
[www.sustainabledevelopment.un.org](http://www.sustainabledevelopment.un.org)



# INTRODUCTION

The aim of this guide is to help you get your message across to a wider audience when talking about sustainable development and the post-2015 development agenda.

It is essential to see the media, in all its forms, as providing a valuable opportunity to talk about what you do and how important it is. The media can help to convey your messages to a targeted or simply wider audience, and to help hold decision-makers and governments to account.

In order for this to happen you also need to understand why journalists and media outlets behave as they do, what they are looking for, and how you can help them find it.

It is about building trust with media practitioners and working together to tell compelling stories to an audience that wants to hear them.

## WHO THIS GUIDE IS FOR

As part of the Sustainable Development 2015 (SD2015) programme, this guide is for anyone who is working in the sustainable development sector and on the post-2015 development agenda: NGOs, CSOs, charities, private sector, governmental organisations or any other stakeholder group that might engage with the media.

The SD2015 programme also provides a separate Advocacy Toolkit, specifically designed to help you develop an advocacy strategy to influence the post-2015 development agenda. This media-focused guide can be used to help target that strategy, develop its messages and engage with media as effectively as possible.

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The guide is split into different topics, with tips on how to deal with the media in different situations. You can either work your way through from start to finish, or go directly to the most relevant sections to find practical advice.

## MORE MATERIALS ONLINE

You can access this guide online at the [SD2015 website](http://www.SD2015.org). Throughout 2014 and 2015 the site will be updated with case study examples and audio materials.

- [www.SD2015.org](http://www.SD2015.org)  
(click on Engagement Tools > Media Support)

### A WORD ABOUT LANGUAGE

The focus of this guide is to help you engage with a non-specialist audience. We will therefore include a jargon-busting section on [www.SD2015.org](http://www.SD2015.org), highlighting words and phrases which might confuse a journalist or an audience not familiar with sustainable development issues.

Some of these specialist words may be very familiar to you, and you may therefore be surprised that they could be confusing. Even the word stakeholder can be off-putting to someone who does not work in this field.

Wherever possible when engaging with media outlets try to use language that a non-specialist will understand. This is particularly important if you are being interviewed for radio, TV or the web. It will help you come across as honest, open and approachable.

### THE TOPICS COVERED



1. What is your message?
2. Targeting your audience
3. Understanding journalists
4. Approaching journalists
5. Working with journalists
6. Press releases
7. Media interviews
8. Events and press conferences
9. Photos and photo calls
10. Editorials and advertorials
11. Social media
12. Dealing with a crisis
13. Jargon-busting



# 1. WHAT IS YOUR MESSAGE?

Working with the media is not just about generating publicity for a good cause. It is about helping an audience understand something specific about what you are doing. You might also want them to take some action, such as volunteer, donate money, campaign or sign a petition.

Every organisation has an overall objective for the work it is doing. For example, Oxfam’s overall objective is to fight injustice and poverty. Its communications have to fit in with that aim.

For communications to be effective you need to be clear about the outcome from any message you are trying to convey.

The outcome is the effect a message will have on anyone who hears it. Every time you engage with the media use the following questions to inform your planning:

- What do you want the audience to understand?
- What do you want the audience to remember?
- What do you want the audience to do?

## MESSAGES ARE NOT SLOGANS

A slogan is a short and memorable statement which encapsulates what an organisation is about.

Messages, on the other hand, are more targeted and embody what you are trying to help someone to understand, remember or do.

It is important to keep messages simple. When working with the media you have very little time to get the message across, and you do not want to confuse either the journalist or the audience.

### FOR EXAMPLE



HelpAge India uses the slogan:

#### FIGHTING ISOLATION, POVERTY AND NEGLECT

Examples of HelpAge India’s messages include:

- Working for the care of disadvantaged older persons and to improve their quality of life.
- Encouraging seniors to speak up for their own rights.
- Helping elders rebuild their own lives and take charge of their own future.

The Green Economy Coalition (GEC) uses the slogan:

#### PROSPERITY FOR ALL WITHIN ONE PLANET LIMITS

Examples of the GEC’s messages include:

- Committed to accelerating the transition to a green and fair economy.
- Sharing experiences and policy practices across our global network.
- Influencing key decision makers at the local, national and international levels.

The charity Active Intervention for Mothers in Mali uses the slogan:

#### TOGETHER WE STAND AGAINST MATERNAL MORTALITY

Examples of AIM’s messages include:

- We provide women with state of the art healthcare.
- We ensure the distribution of medical supplies and contraception.

### KEY POINTS



- Keep messages simple and easy to remember.
- Do not confuse your audience.
- Your communications objective tells you **why** you are communicating.
- Your message is **what** you want to say.

To learn more about developing your messages and objectives in the context of the post-2015 development agenda, see the *SD2015 advocacy toolkit*.



## 2. TARGETING YOUR AUDIENCE

Each time you communicate you need to decide who your message is aimed at. The recipient is your **target audience**.

For each communications objective you may have a number of target audiences, but each individual message should clearly target one audience. Differentiating between types of audience is important. It helps you focus your message and the methods you can use to get it across.

### HOW TO DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN AUDIENCES

It is tempting to treat everyone as a potential audience, but targeting a message at ‘everyone’ will end up being so vague that you will end up grabbing no one’s attention.

Identifying common interests or characteristics will help you differentiate between audiences.

For example:

- Are you trying to speak to business people or members of the public?
- NGOs or governments?
- Other sustainable development actors or those outside the field?
- Specialist sectors and experts, or practitioners in the UN Major Groups?
- Do they understand specialist language and jargon, or everyday language?

Depending on your answer to these questions (and many others) you will be able to focus your message and decide how to get that message across.

### MEDIA AND AUDIENCES

Journalists understand the importance of knowing the audience. This is the way they work out which questions are relevant to readers, listeners and viewers. Any media organisation will aim to engage with a specific type of person.

If you are hoping to get your message across via any media outlet, you need to think about who you are trying to reach and whether your message matches the audience for that outlet.

You may have to do some research to work out which media outlets are the best for your target audience. This should involve familiarising yourself with the content of newspapers, magazines and websites, listening to radio programmes or looking out for relevant TV programmes.

While doing this, keep a note of any journalists who are interested in the kind of topics you are involved in. Contact them by name and ask them what sort of items they are interested in and how you might help. We look at this in more detail in Sections 3 and 4.

### PRIMARY AND SECONDARY TARGETS

You can sometimes use one target audience to help you reach another. These are called **multipliers**.

For example, if you wanted to help school children learn about sustainable development you could target teachers with information and materials they could use in the classroom.

Multipliers can take many forms. Here are some examples:

- Professional advisors, such as accountants
- Journalists
- Politicians
- Well-known personalities
- Professional organisations, unions or other special interest groups.

#### KEY POINTS

- Every time you need to get your message across, focus on the target audience for that message.
- Identify the specific characteristics for that audience, including their interests.
- Think about how they normally consume other messages. Which media are typically used by this audience, and what sort of language do they use.





### 3. UNDERSTANDING JOURNALISTS

In the era of social media the role of the journalist is not as clear cut as it used to be. However, journalists are important in passing on and contextualising messages from stakeholders. For this to happen effectively you have to make the journalist’s job easy and to develop a relationship with journalists who are likely to have an interest in your field of work.

#### TIMING

Journalists usually work to tight deadlines. In the broadcast media they have to prepare video and audio to go out on a bulletin or in a programme. If they miss their deadlines they may even lose their job.

For print media the deadlines are often days or weeks ahead of publication. You need to bear this in mind if you are hoping to get coverage through a specific magazine, journal or newspaper.

#### WHAT IS NEWS?

Journalists are always looking for something that is **new**, **interesting** and **relevant** to their specific audience. For example, a local newspaper will constantly be on the look out for events that include local places and local names. Localising your own messages will help them engage with you.

Here are some of the characteristics that can make a story newsworthy:

- New and fresh
- Tells a story with human interest (e.g. people or communities struggling against adversity - related to local, national or global circumstances)
- Affects large numbers of people (which in the case of the post-2015 development agenda can mean a community or nation affected by policy, or the world’s population affected by the course of sustainable development)
- Unusual
- Mysterious
- Involves someone famous supporting your campaign or related objectives
- Falls on an anniversary or follows another major event (e.g. Rio+20)
- Involves winning prizes or awards
- Involves significant results or changes in behaviour or policy.

News will be judged differently depending on the target audience. A specialist website may be very interested in something you are doing, where a national news outlet may feel it is not sufficiently relevant.

#### FOR EXAMPLE



This BBC story about women’s hygiene products in India is, on the face of it, not an obvious news item. But it has some typical news characteristics:

- It is a human interest story, told from the point of view of an inventor who has struggled for years.
- The inventor was eventually presented with an award by the President of India.
- His invention is relevant to huge numbers of women around the world.

Because of these characteristics, this story has been written to appeal to a wide audience.

- Read the story on the BBC website: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-26260978>

This item on the Guardian website is really about rebuilding sustainable family businesses in Rwanda. To engage with a potentially dry subject it uses the example of Rwanda’s first ice-cream parlour and the women who work there.

- Read the story on the Guardian website: <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2014/apr/26/rwanda-women-ice-cream-business-sweet-dreams>

#### KEY POINTS



- Be aware of the journalist’s deadline. Work within this framework so that you can pass information or carry out interviews in good time.
- Look for media outlets that reach the kind of people you are trying to reach, whether that’s locally, nationally or internationally.



## 4. APPROACHING JOURNALISTS

Before you can engage with a media outlet you need to identify relevant individuals within it, and build up a relationship with them.

Take a systematic approach to this task, and always bear in mind that you need to work with the journalist, not simply use them as a conduit for your views.

- To start, set up a list with three columns or sections.
  - In the first column write the name of the media organisation (newspaper, TV programme, website, etc.)
  - In the second, list the kind of stories carried by that outlet which overlap with your interests. (To research this, see under 'Media and audiences' in section 2.)
  - In the third column write the name of any journalist associated with stories in column 2. You should also try to find contact details for that journalist.
- Once you have a journalist's name try to familiarise yourself with a range of articles or reports by the same person. This will help you to understand the kind of stories that this journalist is interested in covering. Take particular note if the journalist has won an award for previous work.

For example, you may see an article about environmental issues in Latin America. Has the journalist covered the story because she is an environmental specialist, or because she is only interested in Latin American stories? The answer to this question would affect the way you would approach her with information about your work.

- Contact the journalist by phone or email personally (do not just write to 'the newsdesk') and express interest in the stories she covers. Ask what sort of stories she is looking out for, and explain how you or your organisation may be able to help supply ideas. Ask how you should contact the journalist in the future, and what sort of deadlines she has to work to.

Approaching journalists in this constructive way demonstrates that you are aware of their needs. This will help build a trusting professional relationship between you.

### SPEEDING UP THE PROCESS

You will be able to gather information about relevant journalists more quickly by talking to people who also work in your field. Media engagement is a collaborative process, and the more you can learn from others (and help others with your own knowledge) the easier it will be to get your message across.

One other obvious source is the internet. Use a search engine to look for journalists with relevant interests. Vary the search terms to include areas of specialism, countries or regions, and even dates.

### BLOGGERS ARE JOURNALISTS TOO

Do not assume that every media outlet is large. Journalists may well work for a number of publications but also have their own website or blog (which is a kind of online journal).

When researching journalists look out for any blogs that may help you understand their area of specialism.

#### FOR EXAMPLE



The environmental activist George Monbiot writes for the Guardian newspaper in the UK. He also writes articles for his own website at <http://www.monbiot.com>.

#### KEY POINTS



- Build up information about relevant journalists in a systematic way.
- Use online search engines to research relevant stories and the journalists (and bloggers) who write them.
- Vary searches to make your findings more relevant. For example, Google has a News section, accessible at the top of its main web search page. Use this to filter results as well as using the main search page.
- Contact journalists personally, do not just write to 'the newsdesk'.
- Ask journalists what they are interested in and make a note of what they say so that you can refer to it in the coming months or years.



## 5. WORKING WITH JOURNALISTS

Journalists will respond positively to you if you can provide them with information that meets the needs of their target audience. They will be keener to talk to you if the ‘news’ you have to offer shows some of the characteristics mentioned in Section 3 - Understanding journalists.

Of course, it is not as simple as giving things to a journalist and expecting them to be used. No journalist wants to be spoon-fed or treated like a publicity machine.

Expect to have a constructive conversation with the journalist, and look out for things that they say might help them get the story through their editor. A journalist will often have to convince an editor (boss) that a story is worth running. Try to work with the journalist to find the most attractive elements of the story. This means you need to be:

- helpful
- courteous
- straight-forward
- honest

### BE PROACTIVE

Find ways to communicate regularly with journalists who might cover your work. Get to know each other so that there is mutual respect and understanding. It is important to read and listen to the kind of stories that journalists are interested in. Analyse how much space or airtime is dedicated to different kinds of story.

If you do this, the material you issue to journalists is more likely to be relevant, and more likely to be used.

#### CREATING NEWS



You can often generate stories by being creative. Here are some ideas:

- New policy proposals (e.g. goals, targets or indicators for the sustainable development goals (SDGs))
- Local community projects
- New sponsorship deal
- An open day or public event
- A visit by someone in authority or someone famous
- A personal achievement by one of your team - e.g. speaking at a major conference, undertaking a recognised advisory role
- Anniversaries, e.g. 10th anniversary, 1000th campaign supporter
- Significant numbers, e.g. hundreds/thousands of people living in poverty in a given area
- Announcing future plans
- Commenting on another story that is in the news, highlighting your expertise

### REACTIVE RESPONSES

If a journalist contacts you out of the blue you will still have to respond. You should continue to do this openly and honestly. This should be easy if you have already developed a professional relationship with them.

The ultimate aim is to build and maintain trust.

#### HOW TO REACT



Getting an unexpected call from a journalist can be unnerving but if you stick to the golden rules you should have a positive experience.

- Respond promptly to any media enquiry
- Always return a phone call if you have promised to do so
- Ask why they are calling, what the context is, and what their deadline is
- Check your facts
- Do not make it up! If you do not know the answer to a question, say you will get back to them once you have found out.
- Never, ever lie. The truth always comes out eventually.

#### KEY POINTS



- A journalist will often have to convince an editor (boss) that a story is worth running. Try to work with the journalist to find the most attractive elements of the story.
- Develop professional relationships with journalists over time. Invite them to learn about what you do before stories develop, perhaps by inviting them to an event you are running.
- Get to know what sort of stories they like to cover.



## 6. PRESS RELEASES

A press release is a written or recorded communication directed at members of the news media for the purpose of announcing something you would like reported.

Journalists receive press releases all the time. Most are sent electronically and many are deleted without being opened. Hard copies mostly end up in the bin.

The main reason is because the information is of no interest, or perceived to be irrelevant. But it can also be because the press release is badly written.

It is up to you to help the journalist grasp the point of the release from the headline and the first paragraph. Do not assume the journalist will read beyond this.

### TARGETING YOUR PRESS RELEASE

- Only send a press release to journalists who are likely to be interested in the contents
- Prepare a list of target media. This will help you decide the news angle(s) and writing styles
- Write several versions with different angles if you are targeting different types of media
- Vary the language and detail if necessary. For example, use specialist terms for a technical journal but not for a community newspaper
- Always think about the ultimate target audience - the reader, viewer or listener. What will interest them?

#### FOR EXAMPLE



Imagine your NGO has secured sponsorship from a major communications company. It involves hosting an online communications hub to promote your cause, engaging and mobilising stakeholders around the SDGs.

The main press release might say something like:

*“NGO X will help people to have their say on humanity’s future, thanks to a lucrative sponsorship deal...”*

The press release for the communications trade press might say:

*“Communications company X has agreed to sponsor a local NGO as part of its profile-raising campaign...”*

For a development/third sector site the press release might say:

*“Stakeholder participation in the SDGs will be boosted this year...”*

### HOW TO CONSTRUCT A PRESS RELEASE

Your press release must be newsworthy and have a news angle. The new element will vary depending on the media you are targeting. This should go in the headline and should be expanded slightly in the first paragraph, together with the main facts.

The press release needs to answer these questions:

- **WHO? WHY? WHAT? WHEN? WHERE? HOW?**

This is how journalists construct their stories so you need to give them the material to work with.

Here are some other tips:

- The first paragraph should be just one or two short sentences.
- The detail behind the main facts should be further down in the main text of the press release, with the least important at the end.
- Include a short quotation from someone relevant to the story, perhaps a named senior individual from your organisation. A quote gives life and adds human interest.
- Do not quote anyone without checking first they agree with the form of words and context.
- Include a brief statement about your organisation if it is not well-known. This background can be at the bottom of the release in a separate ‘note to editors’.
- Make the date of issue clear to avoid confusion, and state clearly whether the news is embargoed until a later date.
- Add a contact name, phone number and email address at the bottom in case the journalist wants to clarify something or needs more information.
- Do not put the head of your organisation as the contact person, unless he or she is willing and able to take calls.
- No press release should be more than two pages of double-spaced A4 paper (about 300 words in English).

#### YOUR STORY MIGHT NOT BE THEIRS



Do not assume that a press release will be used in the way you intend. A journalist might take some of your material and add it to a different story on a related topic.

It might also prompt a journalist to enquire about other things that your organisation does.

Assume a journalist will re-write your press release to make it more relevant to a specific audience.



### KEY POINTS



- Is the announcement new and worthy of a press release?
- Decide your target audience first
- Make it very clear at the top of the press release what the story is about
- Keep press releases short and to the point
- Send a press release only to the journalists or media outlets that can reach your target audience
- Make it easy for journalists to contact someone in your organisation for further information.

Use this check list to ensure your press release is as focussed as possible:

### PRESS RELEASE CHECKLIST



#### Before you start

- Who is the release targeted at?
- Who will be reading it?
- Where will the content appear? (online, newspaper, journal?)
- Decide whether it is best as a separate document or body of an email.

News should be:

- new
- relevant
- interesting

#### Writing the press release

- Use a template with your logo and the words 'PRESS RELEASE' at the top - and standard background info about the business at the bottom.
- Use a standard font in 11pt or 12pt.
- Is it embargoed or for immediate release? Always put a date.
- Use short sentences and short paragraphs - especially for the Web.
- No more than two pages of double-spaced A4.
- Include a quote from key personnel if possible.
- Does the release answer key journalistic questions? **WHO? WHY? WHAT? WHEN? WHERE? HOW?**
- Check spellings - preferably with a dictionary.
- Double check any names (including place names) and times.
- Add contact info for more details, including an out of hours phone/email address if appropriate.
- Ask a colleague to read the press release you have written and check for errors.

#### Follow up

- Phone to check they received the release.
- Offer photos and other materials as necessary.
- Archive the press release where you and your colleagues can find it.



Use this planning template to prepare any press release.

**PRESS RELEASE PLANNING TEMPLATE**



Who's the press release for (specialist journal? local paper? etc....)

.....

Purpose of this press release (e.g. raise profile? emphasise community involvement? etc....):

.....

What's the top line? What's new?:

.....

Date of issue:

Embargoed?:

.....

Quote from?:

.....

Key contact info:

.....

.....

Follow up actions?:

.....

.....

Other useful information:

.....

.....

.....

Which key messages are supported by this press release?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



## 7. MEDIA INTERVIEWS

Being interviewed for the broadcast media can be daunting. But there are some basic rules and techniques which will increase your chances of being effective.

First, remember that you are the expert, and that's why they've asked for an interview with you.

Second, this is a great opportunity to talk about the wonderful work that your organisation does, or the importance of its impact. Broadcast interviews are particularly good for this because you are appearing in person and cannot easily be misquoted.

Third, the interviewer will want you to perform well, as it will make for a better interview. They may challenge you to justify your answer, but they won't be trying to trip you up unless they are investigating some wrong-doing and think you are hiding something.

### BEFORE AGREEING

It is important to know why an interview is being requested. This may be obvious if it is in response to a press release you have sent them, but it is still important to check the following:

- What is the angle or context for the interview
- What is the likely line of questioning
- Will it be live or recorded
- Who is likely to be viewing or listening to the interview when it is broadcast (the target audience).

Ask yourself if the interview is likely to be to your organisation's advantage or disadvantage. Will it help you achieve your overall communications objectives? Will it enable your organisation to communicate its key messages to its target audiences? Are there any negatives?

Many people want to know what questions will be asked. Do not be surprised if the journalist does not tell you. They may not know precisely what questions they will ask, because they will need to react to what you say in the interview.

However, it is legitimate to ask what **areas of questioning** are going to come up.

### THE DAY OR HOUR BEFORE

Prepare thoroughly. Think carefully about the likely questions and responses.

What is your overall communications objective? How will this interview contribute?

Think of human examples that illustrate the point you are trying to make. Real stories about real people are very powerful.

What are your key messages?

### WHAT IS A KEY MESSAGE?



A key message is the thing you want people to remember after they have heard you being interviewed.

Key messages need to be simple and easy to grasp. This helps the audience understand what you are trying to say, but it also means you are more likely to remember them in the heat of doing a broadcast interview.

Examples of key messages could be:

- We are launching a new campaign
- We are doubling our effort to combat certain types of poverty/climate change/etc.
- We want people to engage via our website (so here is the web address)
- We are holding an event/publishing a report

In a three minute broadcast interview, try to focus on getting across just three or four key messages. Any more than that will sound confusing.

### DURING THE INTERVIEW

Treat a broadcast interview like a conversation between you (the expert) and someone who is interested in your work, but who does not know anything about it.

Focus on the person who is interviewing and try to engage them in the subject. Make them interested by talking with passion and authority. Ignore all the surrounding technology like a camera or microphone. Just talk to this one person. Do not think too hard about the audience. They are simply eavesdropping on your fascinating conversation. A live interview gives you more control as it cannot be edited.

### ON THE RECORD

You should treat any discussion with a journalist as 'on the record', which means they might use it in a story. Just because an interviewer has closed a notebook or switched off a recorder it does not mean they have stopped being a journalist.

If you have a very good relationship with a specific journalist it may be possible to fill them in off the record on some background which may help them to understand a controversial aspect of the story. But only do this rarely and if you are completely confident that they will respect your confidentiality.



### HOW TO PREPARE



The golden rule for a media interview is prepare and rehearse, prepare and rehearse, and then prepare and rehearse!

But do not learn a script. Rehearse useful phrases and prepare examples to illustrate your key messages.

Practise what you hope to say in front of a mirror. Even better, work with a colleague, with one of you playing the role of the journalist.

The aim is to sound articulate and confident - practice always helps.

### KEY POINTS



- Treat a broadcast interview as a great opportunity for some publicity for your organisation.
- Focus your preparation on the key messages you'd like to get across.
- Do not learn a script. Rehearse useful phrases and prepare examples to illustrate your key messages.
- A live interview gives you more control as it cannot be edited.



## 8. EVENTS AND PRESS CONFERENCES

There are a number of ways to engage with journalists which involve setting up events. These range from formal press conferences to less formal press briefings or press receptions. Whichever you are involved in there are some golden rules to ensure you make the most of the opportunity to show-case your organisation.

### PRESS CONFERENCES

These events have a typical structure and usually coincide with a major announcement. They also involve senior members of the organisation who will be able to meet and be interviewed by invited journalists. This adds impact to the announcement and allows for more detail than can be contained in a simple press release.

Press conferences need to be well organised, as the smooth running of the event is as important to your reputation as the clarity of the messages.

#### BEFORE

- Only invite journalists likely to be interested in the subject
- Note expected attendees and confirm 24 hours beforehand
- Prepare a conference timetable (maximum one hour)
- Plan, prepare and rehearse all speeches
- Choose someone who can chair or facilitate the event, and brief him/her fully
- Prepare press releases, background notes and other handout material
- Consider potential questions - and prepare suitable answers
- Brief all your colleagues attending on what to say - and most importantly what not to say - to the media
- Brief key people on journalists who will be there and their likely issues or interests
- Prepare lapel name badges for everyone
- Arrange light refreshments (depends on time of day and local culture)
- Arrange a photographer to take pictures for the record and maybe for the media too - while making sure people are happy to be photographed

#### ON THE DAY

- Greet journalists on arrival - and write down their names
- Distribute handout material on arrival. Do not email everything in advance, or the journalists may not turn up!
- Distribute name badges on arrival
- Provide a timetable - and keep to it
- After speeches/announcements, take questions from the floor
- Write down who asks what and the responses
- Allow time for individual media interviews after the main event

#### AFTER

- Email the press release and background material to all target journalists unable to attend immediately after the Press Conference
- Collate all media coverage as a record
- Make sure all journalists who attended are on your regular press distribution lists for future contact

#### LESS FORMAL EVENTS

Press briefings or receptions (which usually have food and drink available) can be a good way of meeting journalists in a more relaxed atmosphere.

They usually involve a smaller number of journalists who have a specific interest in the things your organisation does.

#### YOU ARE STILL ON DUTY!



Although briefings and receptions are more relaxed ways of getting to know journalists, never forget that you are there to represent your organisation.

Journalists might still put you on the spot with some difficult questions, so make sure everyone involved is clear what they should or should not talk about.

It is a good idea to set ground rules for events like this so that journalists understand what can be discussed and what is off limits.



## KEY POINTS



- Choose the venue to suit the occasion. Make sure it is large enough, with enough seating and facilities for equipment.
- Choose the date and time to suit media deadlines and your target audience.
- Prepare an 'activity schedule' to help with planning. Work backwards from the date of the event, noting everything that needs to be done, by when and by whom. Give copies of the schedule to everyone who needs to take action or know what is going on. Put all requirements and agreed points in writing for the venue management.
- Give any speakers plenty of notice and discuss their topics so that you do not have two people saying the same thing.
- Invitees should be emailed in advance with the timetable and brief details about the speakers. Make this material available on the day as well.
- Register invitees on arrival if possible. This helps you know who is attending and also adds an air of formality and professionalism. Name badges also emphasise formality.
- Check all microphones and equipment beforehand.
- Make sure the event runs according to the timetable.



## 9. PHOTOS AND PHOTO CALLS

Good photos enhance your media material and mean it is more likely to be noticed.

A press release with a well-chosen photo is more likely to be used than one without. The story is also more likely to be noticed by your target audiences if there is an image (or video) alongside it.

### MAINTAINING A PHOTO LIBRARY

Build up a supply of 'stock' photos.

Your 'library' should include up-to-date head-and-shoulders photos of key staff, executives or members and stakeholders. Journalists often request these at short notice to illustrate news items.

Other library shots can help illustrate your organisation's work. For example, if your organisation helps children, a photo of your director with a group of youngsters would be suitable.

### ORGANISING A PHOTO CALL

A photo call is an event to which you invite the media to take photographs for themselves, rather than your providing them with pictures you have already had taken.

It could be an occasion like a prize-giving ceremony or visit by a famous person; or an image of recent environmental damage or technological success. Or it could be an event you have 'created' in order to generate publicity, such as a high-level meeting or public protest.

Think carefully about the target audiences.

- Will the photo enhance the message you want to communicate?
- Will it help show your organisation or objectives in a positive light?

Your photo call must be stage-managed, with everything ready for the photo-journalists to take their shots.

Be prepared to arrange different shots if they want it.

#### KEY POINTS

- **Know and understand your target audiences**  
What sort of images will appeal to them? What type of pictures do the target digital and print publications generally use? What is the purpose of the photographs? What do they need to illustrate? Do they need to convey a message? How will they be used?
- **People make pictures come alive**  
Most images need people to bring them to life. Pictures with people doing something active, not just posing for the camera, are generally best. Shots of buildings and other inanimate objects can look sterile without people. But actions must be relevant to the subject matter.
- **Think about clothing and facial expressions**  
Are people wearing appropriate clothing? Is it too frivolous, or too formal? Should they be smiling, looking positive, animated, concerned or serious?
- **Think about the background**  
What's the setting? Is it an office, a community setting, or a natural backdrop to convey environmental pressures in your area? What would best illustrate your messages?
- **Avoid stereotypes**  
Think creatively. Try not to reinforce prejudices or repeat tired images, like, for example, a polar bear on an ice floe, or crying children in rags.
- **Use a professional photographer**  
If possible, get a professional to take your pictures. It may be easy to take pictures with your phone or tablet, so it is tempting to do the job yourself. But amateur photos almost always look what they are - amateur.

Choose someone familiar with the type of work you want. Someone specialised in taking pictures for the media will understand media needs. Brief the photographer properly beforehand so he/she fully understands what you are looking for.

- **Get consent where appropriate**  
Ensure people being photographed are happy for this to happen. This is particularly important with sensitive subjects. Consent will be required from parents or guardians where children are involved.
- **Provide a caption**  
All pictures need a short caption to explain the contents. It should say who is in the picture, what is happening and where it is.

If you are emailing several photos to the media, make sure it is clear which caption goes with which photo. Descriptive file names with unique numbers help avoid confusion.

- **Keep file sizes manageable**  
Image files can take up enormous amounts of computer memory. Email systems may block big image files. Less than 1MB is a good rule of thumb. Check with the recipient if in doubt.
- **Check copyright**  
Do not be tempted to use images which you have seen online without first checking any copyright issues. Many images used on news websites are specially licenced for that site only. You could be faced with legal action and a fine if you use images without permission.



## 10. EDITORIALS AND ADVERTORIALS

In many parts of the world there can be a blurred line between journalism and advertising. In some countries it is typical that a journalist won't write about your organisation unless they are paid to do so. In other places this is unthinkable as it is seen as corrupting a free press and undermining trust.

If you are engaging with a journalist or media outlet it is important that you are clear about the pros and cons of the various kinds of relationship between you.

### EDITORIALS

This is where the journalist decides what to write about, and will often state a position from the point of view of the relevant media outlet. An editorial will often weigh up various arguments and come down on one side or another.

You do not pay where an editorial comment is involved. The journalist is in control, although you might have some influence over the content through a good relationship with the journalist, your statements or your press releases.

#### PROS:

- The audience tends to trust an editorial if they trust the media organisation.
- You do not pay.

#### CONS:

- You have little control, except through building up good media relations.

### ADVERTORIALS

This is a form of advertising, so you pay for the space. The media outlet will ally itself with the content, and often use its journalistic staff to write the articles, source photos and layout the materials. Sometimes the items are flagged as advertising, sometimes not.

#### PROS:

- You are in control of the content.
- It can look like it is part of the normal output of the organisation, which might encourage the audience to trust the content more.

#### Cons:

- It is advertising, so it costs money.
- It is advertising, so the audience might trust it less than an objective report.

#### KEY POINTS

- Editorial coverage is seen to be more objective than advertising and is therefore more powerful.
- Good media relations is about encouraging accurate and positive editorial comment.





# 11. SOCIAL MEDIA

Social networks such as Facebook and Twitter (and many others) have revolutionised the way people engage with causes and express themselves. This presents tremendous opportunities for stakeholders.

Engaging with your supporters and potential supporters has, in theory, never been easier. However, social media brings different expectations and new challenges.

## DIRECT ENGAGEMENT

You now have the opportunity to engage directly with people, cutting out the media outlets that used to be your only route to an audience. To do this effectively you need to remember some of the golden rules of social media.

- It is about conversations. People are no longer passive recipients of news. They want a say. Are you able to engage with them directly and participate in conversations online?
- It is about being active. Using social media is about demonstrating that you are actively involved in the things you do. Stale or out of date social media accounts make you look out of touch and irrelevant.
- Choose the right social media. Think about your target audience. Do they want to engage with text, share photos, write in-depth articles, etc.? Different social media have different strengths. (See below.)
- Build trust. The best relationships are built on mutual respect and trust. This is what people are looking for in social media. So do not just try to sell things or send out pleas for support. Build relationships with supporters over time.

## SOCIAL MEDIA AND JOURNALISTS

Journalists are now taught to use social media as a source for stories. They use online tools (such as [hootsuite.com](http://hootsuite.com) and [tweetdeck.com](http://tweetdeck.com)) to monitor key words and pick up on developments that might be of interest to their audiences.

Do not forget to communicate with journalists, just as much as you communicate with anyone else. Let them know of any social media accounts that you use to engage with your supporters or to announce developments. Encourage journalists to engage with you too as it enriches the online conversations.

### DIFFERENT MEDIA, DIFFERENT FOCUS



Not all social media are the same. Be sure you are using the ones that are most relevant to your supporters and interested journalists. Here is a list of some common social media.

#### The big four:

**Facebook** allows you to set up a page with photos and regular updates about your work. Other Facebook users can show their support by clicking on a ‘like’ button and sharing the information with their own contacts.

**Twitter** is very good for referring people elsewhere and giving short snippets of information to keep people up to date. Topics can be ‘labelled’ with ‘hashtags’ (using the symbol ‘#’ in front of a word) to allow similar tweets to be grouped together.

**Google+** (“Google plus”) is a tool for communicating and sharing information with people you know in a similar way to Facebook. It also has a group video conferencing feature.

**LinkedIn** is a professional networking tool, and therefore a bit more serious than Facebook or Twitter. It allows you to set up a ‘company page’ to talk about developments in your organisation.

#### Some other commonly used social media tools:

**Instagram** allows people to share photographs, images and very short video clips. (The BBC has started experimenting with very short news videos using Instagram.)

**Vine** encourages people to create and share short videos which repeat in a loop.

**Pinterest** calls itself a ‘social catalogue’ and allows people to bring together photos and links around any subject. The aim is to ‘inspire’. It is also possible to set up a ‘business account’ on behalf of your organisation.

**Reddit** describes itself as the “front page of the internet”. It allow users to collect links in one place and add comments or discussions about them.

**Tumblr** is a ‘micro-blogging’ site which allows links, photos and other content to be brought together in short articles.

**StumbleUpon** brings together items from around the Web, grouped according to a user’s interests. Users can rate their interest in the items they collect.

Note: This is just a short list of some common social media tools. There are many others, and sites like this can gain popularity or lose out to competitors very quickly. It is important to be alert to shifting trends, and to focus on the social media that are being used by people you are trying to communicate with.



## READ, COMMENT, REFER

Social media can be daunting at first. In order to become familiar with their features without being overwhelmed, take a step by step approach.

- Ask your friends and colleagues which social media tools they use and why.
- Try one social media tool at a time, connecting up with your friends and colleagues where relevant.
- Take it slowly. Read and explore first so that you can see how other people are using the tool. Take note of interesting features or items.
- Once familiar with how it works, add your own items or comments. Social media is about sharing items and opinions.
- Use social media to refer to (link to) relevant items elsewhere online, especially to material generated by your own organisation.
- Play to the strengths of the social media you are using. For example, Twitter is good for short (sometimes irreverent) comments on current issues, whereas Pinterest makes more use of visual images.
- If using many different social media, manage them all together in one place using tools like [hootsuite.com](http://hootsuite.com) or [tweetdeck.com](http://tweetdeck.com).
- If a particular social media site is not meeting your specific needs, feel free to close down your account and move on.

## LANGUAGE AND TONE

Using social media is like holding a conversation with a group of like-minded people. As a result the language used is very informal. Even if you want to refer people to formal reports or written articles, bear in mind that the tone of a social media conversation should be friendly, human and conversational. Try to avoid making your comments sound dry or 'corporate'.

### FOR EXAMPLE



Plan International (slogan: “promoting child rights to end child poverty”) uses Twitter to link to hard-hitting and serious items. But the language is often friendly and engaging. Note the informal tone in this recent tweet about an advocacy toolkit.





## 12. DEALING WITH A CRISIS

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This guide is mainly focused on being proactive and ensuring that you build good relationships with the media.

Occasionally you might have to be reactive and deal with critical questions from a journalist, perhaps in response to something that has gone wrong.

There is often a temptation to hide from the media or ignore their approaches. That is the worst way to deal with a crisis. In a vacuum of information rumour takes over and people assume the worst.

### BE PREPARED

Dealing with difficult situations requires people to think quickly and respond to unexpected questions. It is a good idea to prepare a communications plan before things go wrong and discuss it with your organisation's senior team.

To do this think of the worst thing that might happen, or the most difficult or probing question you could be asked. Perhaps someone would accuse you of falling down on the job, or point to a conflict of interest between what you advocate and how your organisation is funded. Work out what you would do and how you would communicate this to journalists and via social media outlets.

### DO NOT PANIC

There are some good techniques to adopt when handling a crisis.

- Keep calm and focused on the subject.
- Keep communication channels open. Return calls or emails promptly, even if it is to say that you will update the journalist later in the day.
- Keep to the facts. Speculation will leave you looking like you are making it up. If the speculation turns out to be wrong people might think you lied deliberately.
- Be honest. If you do not know the answer, admit it, particularly if you are dealing with a breaking and fast-moving news story.
- Where appropriate demonstrate as clearly as you can what you are doing to rectify the situation. Audiences will be more sympathetic if you show that you are taking swift action.
- Make sure anyone who is quoted, or who appears in media interviews, is sufficiently aware of the key facts, and has the authority to speak.
- Show concern and human warmth where appropriate. You do not want to come across as uncaring.



## 13. JARGON-BUSTING

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Every industry has its own jargon, a way of using short words and phrases that help speed things along.

Unfortunately jargon has some big disadvantages:

- It excludes people who are not specialists.
- It causes misunderstandings.
- It can encourage people to be lazy about what they really mean. (Why think about precise meaning when you can simply reach for a handy phrase that sounds like you know what you are talking about?)

Jargon is the enemy of good media relations. It alienates audiences and makes it sound like you are trying to hide something.

### EVERYDAY LANGUAGE

Specialist language should be dropped in favour of the kind of words that are used in everyday speech. That way, everyone will be able to understand you.

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