

8 Steps to Media Outreach

- 1. Learn the landscape.** Map out the local media contacts who are likely to be interested in your story. Who has written about addictions before? What local reporters/outlets cover topics on health, public health, or other related issues? What types of stories do they tell, and is there a common theme to the type of information they convey? How often do they publish or broadcast? Who is their audience? Reading your local papers should flag key reporters for you, but you can also search Google and Twitter for reporters who are covering your issues in your area. Make a list of reporters who have written on these issues before.
- 2. Prepare your pitch.** Using the storytelling tips in this toolkit, create a “pitch” that explains why your story is newsworthy. Remember reporters like human conflict and to hear from real people. Think about how you might tailor the story based on what you learned in researching the different outlets. Be sure to include your contact information and a specific ask of the reporter.
For example, an email pitch might look like this:
Dear Holly: I really appreciated your story last month on the opioid crisis in our community. As you may know, the US Surgeon General is releasing a report next week that covers this very topic. As the leader of a behavioral health center in Memphis, I know firsthand what happens when patient expectations are to leave with a prescription. I would be pleased to talk with you, or connect you with some of my clinicians, about the conclusions of the report and the kinds of interventions we are trying at ABC Center. You can reach me directly any time on my cell phone at xxx-xxx-xxxx.
- 3. Send in your pitch.** Do NOT send a generic group email! Email each reporter on your list the pitch you have tailored for them. As noted in the example above, personalize each message reference a story they have recently covered or an issue they seem interested in.
- 4. Follow up.** Within 24 hours, call to follow up on your message. Briefly introduce yourself and mention you are following up on an email and reiterate the topic in a few words (e.g., “Hello, my name is Jamie and I’m following up on the email I sent you yesterday about how we’re responding to the addictions crisis here in town.”). Be mindful that the reporter may be on deadline (usually deadlines are late afternoon so you should call in the morning) and be respectful of their time. If they are on deadline or not interested in your story, thank them and move to the next call. If they are interested, be ready to tell your story and reiterate your pitch.
- 5. Be flexible.** Have a spokesperson ready to share your key talking points or relate your story – and have them ready for an interview before you contact reporters. It may take a while to get a response from a reporter, but they will often have a need for a quick turnaround to conduct the interview if they do respond. You have pitched to them that you are a trusted resource, so be one.
- 6. Track coverage and share it with your networks.** Set up media alerts to check if your story, or a related story, is covered. If your story is covered, save the clips and compile a report of media mentions. Give the story more visibility by sharing it with your staff and clients, and on your social media channels. If your story isn’t covered, you will still want to see what related stories are being shared so that you can refine future pitches, or be ready for when it seems the timing is right again. When you get coverage, add the reporter to your list of reporters who care about your issue, with notes on what you learned about them, the stories that interest them and the kind of coverage you got.
- 7. Give thanks – personally and publicly.** Don’t forget to thank reporters who cover your story – it helps to be courteous so they may refer to you for future stories. A quick thank you email is important. It is also important if the story appears on the paper’s website to get your community to share it on social media, comment on the paper’s website, or “like” it on Facebook. That kind of social “thank you” tells the reporter – and importantly, his or her editors – that this issue resonates with the community. The result is often more coverage.
- 8. Follow up.** Now you are in a relationship with the reporter. Keep it going! Periodically share a related resource you mentioned as part of the interview or that relates to the discussion or supports a key point. Forward interesting studies or research that you come across. If you periodically “feed” your new friend they are more likely to call you as a source when a story comes up.