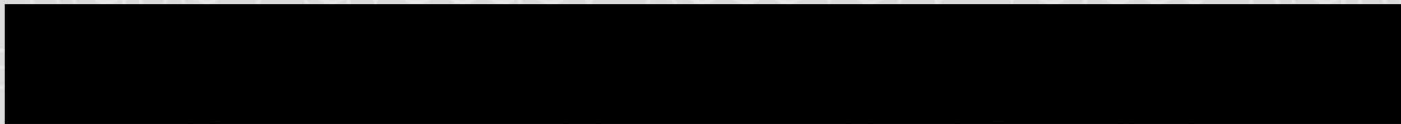


# HOW TO REACH OUT TO THE MEDIA



**Recovery  
Advocacy Toolkit**

MAKING OUR VOICES COUNT

**Recovery**

## WHY THE MEDIA IS IMPORTANT

The media has tremendous power to shape public opinion. Media coverage – or lack of it – can radically alter how the public thinks about people with addiction and the reality of recovery. Traditionally, media coverage has focused on the problem – addiction; not on the solution – long-term recovery. While we've made significant strides in improving coverage in recent years, we still have a long way to go in putting a face and a voice on long-term recovery from addiction in the media.

For all of your recovery advocacy work and campaigns, you will want to develop an effective media strategy to garner coverage, educate the public, promote the vision and mission of your organization, and increase the visibility of the recovery community. Your work in the media allows you to reach a larger segment of the population and get your side of the story out.

The media is a key source of information for the public and policymakers about the issues we care about. That is why it is so important to make it a priority to influence how the media educates the public about addiction and recovery. The media gives us an opportunity to inform, motivate and persuade the public to support policies that make it possible for people to get the help they need and end policies that discriminate against people in recovery.

Many recovery community organizations have been successful in getting media coverage of their activities. They have used tools like press releases, media advisories, op-eds, and radio announcements. They have also built relationships with reporters and other people who work in the media. Recovery advocates have learned that you need to do more than send out a press release to get good media coverage.

It is very important to get the most out of any conversation you have with the media. Reporters may only give you a couple of minutes to listen to what you have to say. In that short period of time, they will decide whether or not they want to write an article or do a story.

You will need to be persistent – making a phone call to a reporter to make sure they received your release and letting the reporter know how important your story is. Often reporters are interested in interviewing people for a story to give it human interest. They may want to interview you or someone you recommend. Interviews are a great way to go beyond what is in your press release and discuss other key messages.

In your recovery advocacy media outreach, you may find that reporters are interested in interviewing a variety of people – individuals in long-term recovery, family members, key opinion leaders in your community, a speaker that you have lined up for an event, or yourself. Make sure that you have been in touch with anyone that you are going to recommend to be interviewed before you give their name and contact information to a reporter. Take a few minutes to work with that person to think through talking points and how they want to talk about their recovery experience with the media. Please consult Faces & Voices messaging section in the toolkit and share that information. Faces & Voices recommends that individuals have at least two years of recovery before being interviewed in the media.

**INTERVIEWS:** Here are some tips that you can use yourself or share with potential spokespeople:

### Getting Ready

- **Know your message:** What do you want your audience to take away?
- **Develop three or four key talking points:** Prepare three or four key points that convey your message and weave these points into all of your answers. Think about what some of the possible questions might be and be prepared with your answers. Practice your talking points.
- **Learn about the reporter and the news outlet:** Find out about the publication or broadcast outlet, the reporter, and the subjects he or she covers. The type of outlet will have an impact on the sort of talking points that you prepare. Many news organizations have web sites that you can visit to read or

watch previous stories. You can also find out more about many reporters by visiting MediaBios at [www.tjfr.com](http://www.tjfr.com).

- **Learn about the story:** Find out the goal the reporter has for the story and try to get a sense of the types of questions that you may be asked.
- **Rehearse questions that you may expect:** After you have a sense of what the reporter might ask you, practice your answers to these questions a few times. Even better, do it in front of a mirror, a friend or a video camera.
- **Relax and focus;** breathing exercises go a long way toward helping you relax and calm jittery vocal chords. Get to your location 10-15 minutes early and spend time practice your core message points.
- **Chat with the interviewer:** Right before the interview begins, chat with the reporter to make sure you both have an understanding of the topics that will be discussed. This is especially important for broadcast interviews, so you don't get caught off-guard on camera.

### The Interview

- **Make your first words the most memorable:** Interest levels go down quickly, so make sure that the first words out of your mouth are on message and hit some of your key talking points.
- **Keep your audience in mind:** The reporter you are speaking with is not your target audience. You are speaking to people as they watch the TV news in their living rooms, listen to the radio in their cars, or read a newspaper while drinking their morning coffee. Talk in a way that engages your audience – don't use jargon and always try to translate your "news" to their lives in a way that's relevant and compelling.
- **Be enthusiastic:** Show your audience how interested you are in recovery. Now, it is time to share your compelling stories to readers, viewers, and listeners.
- **Keep your answers short and simple:** You don't have to keep talking! Most answers to questions should be 15-30 seconds long. You shouldn't feel nervous when no one is talking. Wait for the reporter to ask you the next question.
- **Control the interview:** You can steer the direction of your interview by remembering your key talking points and gently shifting back to them in all of your answers. If a reporter asks you a question you don't want to answer, for example, what was it like to be an addict living on the street, you might say, "What I'm here to talk about is recovery and what it's meant to me and my family." If a reporter's question is vague, don't be afraid to ask for some clarification.
- **Localize and personalize:** Try to make the topic personal to the audience. Including local facts or stories can make an interview more compelling to the listener as well as the reporter.

### After the Interview

- **Review:** Take some time to think about your questions and answers to prepare for your next interview.
- **Send follow-up information:** This is a good opportunity to send the reporter any information that you may have about the topics that were discussed in the interview and to build a relationship with the reporter for the future. Keep good notes of any promise you made to follow-up, and keep them.
- Remember, you are the expert when it comes to recovery. This is why the reporter will be talking with you. Use your key points to provide as much information as you can about what recovery means for you, your family, and community. Make sure that everything you tell the reporter is true. If you can't answer a question, offer to find out quickly or provide additional sources and experts. If you have

questions about talking with the media without violating the traditions of a twelve-step program, you can review “Advocacy with Anonymity” in this toolkit or on the Faces & Voices website at [www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org](http://www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org).

## MEDIA TOOLS

To get attention for your event or news announcement, you will need to engage the media. Media advisories, press releases, and radio rip-and-reads are some of the valuable, effective tools you can use. In this section, you will find some tips for media advisories and press releases and there are templates for you to use later on in this section.

As you begin organizing recovery advocacy events, think about the media as a vehicle to expand the audience for recovery-related messages. By attracting the media, your organization will be able to reach new people with information about recovery and raise awareness and interest in changing policies and attitudes so that more people can get the help they need to recover.

### MEDIA ADVISORIES

A media advisory is an invitation for press to attend an upcoming event and tells them why they should be there. It is a glimpse of what will be happening and, hopefully, will interest them in coming. It should be distributed to media outlets in your community like TV, radio, newspapers, and magazines a minimum of three days before the event. You can e-mail or FAX your advisory and should follow-up with a phone call to each reporter. You should also ask that it be posted on what is called the “daybook,” where events that are happening on a particular day are listed.

#### *Tips for Distributing Your Media Advisory:*

- **Place your media advisory in “daybooks” and “week-ahead” columns in advance:**
  - DAYBOOKS: a daily listing of all activities that media are invited to attend; is not available to the general public.
  - WEEK-AHEAD columns: listings published in local newspapers and business publications that have the ability to reach a wider audience.
- **Create and maintain a media list:**
  - Organize information about reporters including the name of the outlet, contact names, phone numbers, addresses, fax numbers, e-mail addresses, “beats,” or topics they typically write about and information, about when you’ve contacted them.
  - Consider a variety of outlets:
    - University/college newspapers
    - Television, cable, and radio stations
    - Small community papers or neighborhood newsletters
    - Publications or newsletters produced by local businesses, hospitals, women’s centers, health care clinics, professional associations, mental health organizations, church and other faith-based institutions, grocery and drug stores, and civic clubs.
  - Once you have compiled your list of media outlets and reporters, call the outlet’s switchboard or receptionist to confirm the reporters’ contact information and find out if there are any other editors or reporters, such as healthcare reporters, who would be interested in covering your events and activities.
- **Follow-up phone calls:**
  - Make follow-up calls to reporters after you e-mail or fax your media advisory. Ask if they received your e-mail or fax, if they are interested in attending and/or covering your event, and if they have any initial questions about the event, recovery resources, or other general information about addiction and recovery. Being persistent can make a difference in generating media interest.

## PRESS RELEASES

One of the most effective ways to spread the word about your activities is to write and distribute an interesting press release to the media. The reason to issue a press release—sometimes called a news release—is to offer the media a compelling story to publish about the work that you are doing to support recovery in your community, whether they attend your event or not. Ultimately, the goal is to highlight the importance of the message of long-term recovery, recovery organizing, events and activities in your community, and to raise attention and awareness to this critical public health issue.

### *Tips for Writing Your Press Release:*

1. **Put your organization's name on your release:** Use your organization's letterhead if you have one. Make sure to include a telephone number and contact person. If you are doing a project with other organizations, remember to include information about those organizations.
2. **Emphasize the most important details:** Begin with a headline in all CAPITAL LETTERS that summarizes the release and engages the media. The first paragraph should answer the five basic questions about what you are publicizing: who, what, where, when, and why.
3. **Be captivating, yet concise:** A press release should not be longer than two pages, and a one-page release that is short and to the point is preferable.
4. **Highlight local activities and facts:** Local media outlets and audiences are most interested in what is happening in your community. With that in mind, use local statistics about the number of people in your state or region who need treatment and recovery support services to recover from addiction, the number of families affected (if available), and quote experts whose names will be recognized locally.
5. **State the facts, quote the opinions:** Opinions should be written in direct quotes **only**. The main part of the release should be similar to a typical news article you read in your local newspaper. If you are quoting an individual in your release, you must have their permission to use that exact quote. Do not forget to put the quote in quotation marks.
6. **Check for accuracy:** Be sure to verify all spelling, statistics, names, and titles in your press release. Ask someone else to proofread your press release before you send it out.
7. **Include information about your organization:** Add a few brief sentences at the end of the press release about your organization.

## RADIO ANNOUNCEMENT

Radio announcements are yet another way to attract the media to your recovery events. You can use them to share recovery stories and raise awareness and interest in your recovery advocacy activities. A radio announcement is typically about an upcoming event and is read on the radio. It should be distributed to radio producers in your area three to five days before the scheduled event. You can coordinate with a local radio DJ, public affairs director, or station manager to promote your event and mention key messages about your organization on the air. Radio is an important and powerful tool because most stations appeal to specific audiences. By marketing your event to a specific population, you are taking advantage of a great opportunity to interest different groups in your event.

Like a media advisory, you can send it by e-mail or FAX and follow up with a phone call.

### *Tips for Distributing Radio Announcement:*

- E-mail and/or FAX the radio announcement to morning show producers at local radio stations.
- Follow up with a phone call to make sure that they have received it.
- Depending on the radio format and whether or not you have someone who can be a spokesperson, you may want to consider asking the radio show producer if they would like to interview someone from your organization live to promote your event or activity.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The letters to the editor section of your local newspaper is a great forum for getting our message out to local citizens, elected officials and other members of the media. More people read the letters to the editor section than almost any other part of the paper. Letters to the editor show that an issue is of concern in the community and are an excellent tool for education.

### ***Guidelines for getting your letter to the editor printed:***

- Before writing your letter, review the newspaper's policy on letters to the editor to find out how long letters can be and where to send them to. It is frequently available on the newspaper's website under the "Opinion" section.
- Submit your letter by e-mail whenever possible. (Look for the e-mail address on the newspaper's website).
- You can send your letter to weekly community newspapers as well as daily newspapers.
- You must include your name, street address, and phone number. Editors will not run anonymous letters and will often contact you to verify that you wrote your letter.
- Type the letter – double spaced.
- Do not be disappointed if your letter does not get printed. Newspapers receive many letters every day and cannot print them all. Look for another opportunity to submit your letter using a different angle.

## OP-ED (Opposite Editorial)

Op-Eds appear opposite the editorial page in a newspaper and are similar in form and content to an editorial, but represent the opinion of an individual writer who may or may not be affiliated with the publication. Supported by facts and figures, Op-Eds are longer than letters to the editor; one of the reasons that fewer of them are published in newspapers. Usually they are 600-800 words long. Try to use the opportunity of local media attention to addiction and recovery-related issues when you think about the timing for submitting your Op-Ed.

### ***Tips for your Op-Ed:***

- Send your Op-Ed to the editor of the paper, just like you would with a Letter to the Editor.
- Try to think of a catchy title, that lets the editor know what your main point is. It may be changed, but it will help them think about the point-of-view that you want to get across.
- You will be trying to persuade readers of your point of view; therefore, you should use compelling, easy-to-understand language.
- Send your Op-Ed by email with a cover letter.
- You must include your name, street address and phone number. Editors will probably contact you before running your Op-Ed.
- Type the letter – double spaced.
- Don't be discouraged if your Op-Ed is not printed. You can always shorten it and re-submit it as a letter to the editor!

### **Tips to Help You Write Your Op-Ed**

1. **Stick to a single idea** to effectively persuade readers and keep their attention focused on the most important issues.
2. **Use a local story of recovery** to add a personal touch to your Op-Ed. If possible, also include a family member's healing journey. Referring to a local or national event recently in the news also can help bring your story to life.
3. **Plan out your Op-Ed** to stay focused and keep it structured.
4. **Speak your mind.** You are being asked to contribute because you have something important to say.
5. **Back up your opinions** with up-to-date facts that are relevant to both the field and your community. Statistics or study results add credibility to your argument, but try not to overwhelm readers by burying your story in numbers.
6. **Be concise and captivating** by using short, yet compelling, words. Newspapers are written for readers at a fifth-grade level, so remember to avoid using terms and acronyms unfamiliar to those outside the field. Also, do not write more than 600 words; if possible, keep it to 500 words.

7. **Include** your full name and a brief description of who you are and what you do at the end of the Op-Ed, illustrating what makes you an expert on the subject that you are writing about. Make sure to include contact information with your submission.

**Placing an Op-Ed:** Start early when submitting to your local newspaper. Many papers receive up to 500 submissions a week, so it helps to be ahead of the submission deadline. Call the paper and ask for the name of the editorial page editor. Then, contact that person to introduce yourself and your issue.

### **Submitting Your Op-Ed**

- **Practice and know exactly what you will say** before calling the editor. Tell the editor that you are interested in submitting an Op-Ed regarding a particular issue/subject and ask about any specific guidelines (such as word count or submission deadlines). Also, it helps to ask for guidance that would help ensure placement, such as specific topics that would be of interest to their readers, including personal long-term recovery stories or specific research. When you call, be respectful of the editor's time; ask if it is a good time to talk before you start presenting the topic.
- **Understand the submission guidelines** and strictly adhere to them. Many newspapers prefer submissions via e-mail, fax, or an online form on their Web sites, while some may ask you to send it via U.S. mail. Following their preferences will increase the chances of getting your Op-Ed placed. When you send it in, include a cover letter that reminds the editor who you are and remind them about any previous contact you may have had. Highlight—clearly and concisely—why the subject is important to the newspaper's readers.
- **Make a follow-up call** approximately one week after submitting your Op-Ed to give time for the editor to review it. Confirm that it was received and answer any questions the editor may have. Offer to modify it if the editor has reservations about publishing it or suggestions on making it more compelling.