



Media Toolkit

Media is the most powerful tool of communication, and is a critical component of any successful grassroots campaign or project. It allows mass audience the opportunity to learn about the story of your work for a clean and equitable energy economy. This guide will show you how to use traditional media to promote your summer project.

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The Reporter's Perspective

Keep in mind that reporters' job is to get a good story. They may not be up-to-date on your issue. They are under deadlines, often have multiple stories going at once, and they are under constant pressure from their editors. Be direct. Ask the reporter what it will take to get them to cover your story. They might tell you exactly what you need to do. A reporter's job is to find an interesting story that the general public ought to care about; your job is to tell a captivating story to promote your work!

The 'RULES' of Working with the Media:

1. **Stay on message!** Don't confuse the reporter with too much information. They will often choose odd things to highlight in their coverage, so only give them the information you want to get across. It is good to have a short message that you can repeat constantly.
2. **Never lie.** It destroys your credibility. If you don't know an answer, admit it, but say that you can find it for them and get back to them – promptly (remember, they are on a deadline).
3. **There is NO off-the-record.** Remember, the reporter is out to get a story and sell papers. If you tell them something "off the record" it will still end up in the story – it just won't have your name attached to it.
4. **Stay on message!** Repeat it, and repeat it again.

Some Useful Tips:

1. **Prepare a 30-second and 1-minute sound bite that describes your project.** Then when anyone asks you about your project, you can describe it efficiently and effectively on-the-spot. Before talking to a reporter, run what you will say to the reporter by someone who doesn't have any knowledge of your issues – to ensure your message is clear. If you're talking to a reporter and feel like things aren't coming out right, say "let me start again." If you are having a rally or large event, have your members practice their sound bites beforehand. Have 1-2 people who know the issues well be designated as press liaisons. This way the information you give to the media can be controlled and well-prepared. Make sure everyone at the event knows whom to direct the reporters to after they have given their sound bite.

2. **Do the work for them.** If you provide all the information they need to write a story, it makes their life easier (remember they are on a deadline). Furthermore, it allows you to give them the information you want them to have. Reporters are looking for specific things that make a story newsworthy. Here are some 'hooks you can use to 'catch' a reporter: conflict, dramatic human interest, new announcement, trend, local spin to national or global issues (or vice versa); controversy; a fresh angle on an old story; milestone, anniversary, celebrity, special event, etc. Young people like us get covered. Visuals always get attention and send a message that is less corruptible than a verbal one.
3. **When you call a reporter, always ask if they have a minute to talk.** Often times they will be on deadline and will not be able to talk to you then. If they are busy, ask when a better time would be to call them. The reporter will appreciate this greatly and be more receptive.
4. **Don't forget to follow-up.** Fax your press advisory or release, but call to follow up. Be direct: Ask if the reporter plans to show up.
5. **Develop a relationship (not a friendship).** Find out who the environmental reporter is and make sure to send information to them directly. If you are credible, helpful and timely, they will come to you when they are looking for information. It is good to have one person from a group be the press contact for consistency reasons, but this is virtually impossible in student groups with such high rates of turnover.

Media Tools:

- **Media List:** The first thing you need is a media list. It should have reporters' names, faxes, phone numbers, addresses, and emails for TV, radio, and newspapers in your area. Take a look at local publications for reporters who deal with your issues.
- **Press Advisory:** An advisory is written in simple form, **stating the basics of an upcoming event** (Who, what, where, when, and why) **without giving away the substance of the event.** It is a way to alert journalists to events that might interest them. An advisory should be sent out one week before an event and be followed up with phone calls to the reporters. The follow-up call encourages them to cover the event, and is an opportunity for you to answer any questions the reporter might have.
- **Press Release:** A release **should be written exactly like an ideal story would be written, including quotes.** Place the most important items at the beginning of the release. It should generally be kept to one page and should be sent out the day of the event. Follow-up with a phone call to make sure that the release has been received, and urge them to cover the story.
- **Associated Press (AP):** There's an AP bureau in every major city and in the State House. The AP is a news wire, which means that they send out things to other news outlets. **Always send your press advisories and releases to the AP because if they cover an event, it will reach many more papers, radios, etc. than you could.** This isn't to say that you should expect the AP to do all the work for you; you will still have to do work. The point is that sending your advisories and releases to the AP will increase your chances of getting covered.
- **Letters to the Editor:** The editorial page is the second most widely read page of the newspaper after the front page. A letter to the editor should be short – not more than 250 words (varies with paper) – clear, direct and simple, with a maximum of two or three points. Avoid personal attacks. Try to find a local angle, and try to pick a timely issue (or send a letter when it is most timely). Be sure to sign it and include a way for the press to contact you to confirm that you wrote the letter.
- **Radio:** Radio is a great, but often untapped, way of getting press. Radio news editors usually work alone in small dark rooms. Give them a call to let them know about an event or story. They might not be able to send anyone, but you could ask to do a 10-20 second sound bite right then and there. Often they'll say yes, and you'll get to give a little statement, which they'll play on the radio all day.

• **Visuals:** Visuals are a great way to get TV and photo attention. You can build giant puppets or objects to represent your issue. Visual messages are not as easily distorted as verbal ones. If you see a reporter taking an interest in your visual make sure that you approach him or her to put in a few words. For pictures, try to get as many people in the photo as possible. Also, try to find a nice backdrop for your issue.

- **Creative & Fun Images** – Use your creativity and sense of humor to create exciting visuals. Dress up as a wind turbine; create an image with your bikes, solar panel, etc. to raise awareness about the impacts and opportunities associated with our energy choices and policies.
- **Event Visuals** – activists marching backwards to protest a “backwards” policy; youth wearing green hardhats to advocate for legislation creating green jobs; dozens holding candles at a vigil; gardeners dirty from working with soil, holding gardening equipment, etc. How can you visually represent what happened?
- **Use Existing Visuals** – a beautiful natural area that needs preserving, a shuttered manufacturing plant gate, the steps of City Hall. Ideally, these will be easily recognizable and symbolic of an issue affecting local citizens.
- **Human Interest** – Try to put a human face on your story. How does your issue particularly affect one person or a number of people? Who in your community is affected by the problem? Who will benefit from the solutions?
- **Conflict or Controversy** – A story that addresses local conflicts or debates is very attractive to reporters, especially as new developments arise. Create opportunities for those who will be most impacted by the conflict or its potential results to make their voices heard.



*Some information in this part of the guide were provided by the Sierra Student Coalition's Media Guide

Media Examples:

Example Media Advisory Template (from Power Vote campaign last year):

For Immediate Release

[DATE]

Contact: [CONTACT NAME, EMAIL, PHONE]

[YOUR COLLEGE or UNIVERSITY] Students Get to Work October 10th for 350.org International Day of Climate Action

[TOWN/CITY, STATE] – Thousands of communities around the world will come together on October 10, 2010 to participate in 350.org’s Global Work Party. Whether weatherizing homes, installing energy efficient lighting, planting community gardens or hosting bicycle parades, individuals and organizations are getting to work demonstrating local solutions to the climate crisis. As part of this international day of climate action, students from [YOUR COLLEGE or UNIVERSITY] will be [BRIEFLY EXPLAIN YOUR WORK PARTY] to begin transitioning to 100% clean, just and renewable energy by 2020.

WHO: [YOUR COLLEGE or UNIVERSITY] students, [LOCAL EAC PARTNER ORG] and the Energy Action Coalition

WHAT: 10/10/10 Global Work Party – [NAME OF LOCAL ACTION]

WHEN: [DATE and TIME]

WHERE: [DETAILED LOCATION and ADDRESS]

VISUALS: [WHAT REPORTERS WILL SEE THERE]

This summer, [Your project] and the partners and allies of the Energy Action Coalition are launching initiatives to empower young people to help build the clean energy economy in a socially just manner. There are 17 youth-led summer clean energy projects happening across the country that demonstrate the viability of clean energy solutions to meet the needs of communities. The projects encompass many initiatives like ground-breaking strategies for energy efficiency, urban agriculture, renewable energy, sustainable transportation, waste reduction, and green industry. Young people are leading the way to prove that the green economy is not only vital, it is absolutely viable.

You can learn more about the projects at www.wearepowershift.org/summer

Example Press Release Template (from the Power Vote campaign last year):

For Immediate Release

[DATE]

Contact: [CONTACT NAME, EMAIL, PHONE]

[YOUR COLLEGE or UNIVERSITY NAME] Students Pledge to Vote for a Clean, Just Energy Future
Campus “Power Vote” Campaign Mobilizes Students to support Clean Energy in 2010 Elections and Beyond!

[TOWN/CITY, STATE] – [YOUR COLLEGE or UNIVERSITY NAME] students know what’s at stake in the November 2 elections: their future. That’s why this week [YOUR ORGANIZATION] is launching an ambitious effort to urge their fellow students to take the “Power Vote” Pledge to vote for policies that address the climate crisis and environmental injustices locally and globally. A campaign of the Energy Action Coalition, Power Vote seeks to empower young leaders and student groups nationwide, supporting them in transitioning their campuses and communities to 100% clean and just energy sources by 2020.

“Young voters want to solve many of the fundamental problems facing our nation today by getting dirty money out of politics and adopting policies that put public interests above polluter interests,” asserts [STUDENT NAME], a [YOUR COLLEGE or UNIVERSITY NAME] junior majoring in [STUDENT’S MAJOR] and a Power Vote organizer. “It’s time to end our dependence on destructive energy sources, like [LOCAL DESTRUCTIVE ENERGY SOURCE], and move to a sustainable economy powered by clean, renewable energy that will create millions of new green jobs while improving our health and well-being.”

This summer, [Your project] and the partners and allies of the Energy Action Coalition are launching initiatives to empower young people to help build the clean energy economy in a socially just manner. There are 17 youth-led summer clean energy projects happening across the country that demonstrate the viability of clean energy solutions to meet the needs of communities. The projects encompass many initiatives like ground-breaking strategies for energy efficiency, urban agriculture, renewable energy, sustainable transportation, waste reduction, and green industry. Young people are leading the way to prove that the green economy is not only vital, it is absolutely viable.

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Example Letter to the Editor:

To the Editor:

Texas Governor George W. Bush is hoping that, come November, voters will choose him as the next President of the United States. Before voters make a choice, there are a few things that they should know about Governor Bush. Texas has the worst air pollution in the nation. It also has the highest rate of toxic waste production, and the largest number of highly polluting factory farms. Texas' environment has suffered under Bush.

So far there has been no indication that America's environment as a whole will fare any better under Bush. He has already stated that he will work to increase logging in our national forests, including areas that Clinton's Roadless Initiative seeks to protect. He advocates drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and opposes stricter clean air standards, pollution regulations for factory farms, and the designation of new national monuments.

Call Governor Bush and tell him that if he wants your vote, he'll have to do better for America's environment than he has for Texas'.

Sincerely,
Your Name,
Your Address,
Your Phone Number,
Signature

Energy Action Coalition is a coalition of 50 youth-led environmental and social justice groups working together to build the youth clean energy and climate movement.

Working with hundreds of campus and youth groups, dozens of youth networks, and hundreds of thousands of young people, Energy Action Coalition and its partners have united a burgeoning movement behind winning local victories and coordinating on state, regional, and national levels in the United States and Canada.