

COMMUNICATION FOR IMMUNIZATION

E-LEARNING RESOURCES

19 | TIPS FOR WORKING WITH NEWS MEDIA

19| TIPS FOR WORKING WITH NEWS MEDIA

This resource offers information on:

- The nature of news media today
- Descriptions of different types of media and how to work with them
- Tips of what journalists need
- Tips on how to prepare and distribute different media resources
- Tips for spokespeople.

The nature of news media today:

- **The news media are an important channel to reach different audiences.**
- Fostering a relationship with news media can be helpful, but is no guarantee of good coverage.
- **A changing news media:** The traditional news media's role is to be a watchdog – to hold government, organizations and institutions accountable by objectively reporting on events. However, today's news media are changing rapidly as traditional news organizations compete with newer information sources including bloggers and "citizen journalists" who report on social media such as Twitter or Periscope.
- **The news media are under pressure to report information first. This can erode accuracy.**
- **Ultimately the public decides which news media it trusts and wants to read, watch or listen to.**
- **Consult with partners in country to understand the national and local media dynamics and how the government wishes to work with media.**

For the purposes of this resource, the traditional news media can be categorized into different categories according to their location and audience. Here are some characteristics and tips for each:

International media

(e.g. the AP, Reuters, AFP, BBC, CNN, Al Jazeera or the New York Times)

- Audience: Will probably be followed by senior leaders, decision makers and the educated public
- Have evolved from "24 hour news" to "minute by minute" news as they compete to be the first to break stories and provide new information on their websites and social media channels
- Have fewer resources for international news and development news and fewer international correspondents. May report a story in your country from a neighbouring capital.
- They will be interested in unusual outbreaks - polio, measles, cholera, ebola; and may use it as an opportunity to report negatively about the country's immunization program. They will find out about outbreaks in the national papers.
- May appear dispassionate and "neutral", but will also ask very tough questions
- May be interested in stories that represent milestones – such as eliminating polio or measles, or a new vaccine introduction, particularly if it will have a major impact on child mortality or a "first" for a region (e.g. national HPV vaccine introduction).
- When they are reporting a "good news" story and do so accurately, it can be a major benefit to the country and its leaders.
- Keep international media up-to-date on your issues by meeting with them occasionally, and putting them on your mailing list for news releases and other updates. They likely won't report on most stories, but will appreciate keeping current.

National Media

(such as national newspapers, radio and television, and widely-read blogs)

- Audience: will vary depending on the news outlet. They may appeal to elite decision makers, political viewpoints, certain age groups or ethnicities, or the “mass” public
- Newspapers or television may reach national influencers, but radio will more likely reach communities
- May be owned by the state; business or political interests and have specific biases
- May have variable standards of journalism. State owned media may publish exactly what is given to them; reputable private media may report “both sides” responsibly, and some media may focus too much on bad news stories, attracting the public with exaggerated headlines.
- Will appreciate special in-person briefings about issues – e.g. introduction of a new vaccine
- May want to be part of special meetings – an editors breakfast with the Minister of Health or UNICEF representative
- May want to create or belong to special partnerships, such as “Journalists against polio”
- Could be offered an annual prize for best reporting about immunization
- May have special programs that can be targeted with content– for example, a weekly radio call-in program on health
- Can be invited for briefings after major meetings and decisions – eg. NITAGs, or an ICC
- May want to be paid to report on stories. This is not encouraged. However in some countries, it is non negotiable.
- Are a good venue to get a big message out. For example, you could purchase a quarterly advertising page in a newspaper where immunization coverage trends in each district could be printed as a form of public information and district accountability

Community media including radio:

- Audience: specific communities – whether geographically clustered, or targeting a certain ethnic or language group
- Community media offer good opportunities for social and behaviour change as it may be one of the most trusted and influential sources
- Can be a good way to disseminate information to a community engage the community in discussions through call-in programs or entertain people with a radio drama

Blogs:

- Audience: varies from country to country and blog to blog
- Blogs may cover very specific areas (e.g. an entertainment or health blog)
- Bloggers are often NOT journalists and may have no journalistic training and lack journalistic ethics. Their goal is usually to have as many readers as possible.
- If there are blogs in your country, analyse them to determine which, if any, may be useful as a channel. Some bloggers are happy to have “guest bloggers” write about an issue – this may be a good venue to publicise information about immunization
- Some bloggers may have their own political agendas, and should be monitored for inflammatory or damaging information, particularly in times of crises.

Preparing media meetings and materials

This section provides only some basic tips. For more information and media training, talk to the UNICEF or WHO communication team in the country, region or at headquarters.

A news conference

- Should be used for major announcements -a national SIA, an exciting new partnership, new significant resources/donations dramatically improved coverage results, introduction of a new vaccine, or to give information about a crisis.
- The purpose is to brief media to publish a story about the issue
- Media should be invited in advance and they should sign-in with their names and contact information.



- Should be led by a trusted senior official who has been briefed and prepared. The official should have back-up from a technical expert who is good at speaking with the media.
- Is always on the record and media may publish whatever is said.
- Can begin with a short statement about the news; and should include a question and answer period.
- Should include printed hand-outs - a news release and a fact sheet for example.
- Can include maps/charts; photo and video material for distribution.
- Logistics: ensure a room with adequate seating, good acoustics and space for cameras and microphones.
- Be prepared to answer follow-up questions after the news conference has ended.

A media or editorial briefing

- Can be for a group of media (e.g. health reporters) or for a handful of reporters and editors from the same publication
- The purpose of a media briefing is generally to educate, rather than to provide news. The briefing can keep media up-to-date about an on-going issue (e.g. routine immunization coverage trends).
- The purpose of an editorial briefing is to foster relationships, and garner the editors' understanding and support for an issue.
- Prepare a short, easy to understand presentation for media; and provide them with printed hand-outs such as a fact sheet or question and answer leaflet.
- In some countries media and editors expect a meal, room and board and transport to the briefing.

News release:

- Tells media what's new, with an aim for the information to be published
- The new information should have a real impact on people (eg. new vaccine introduction)

- Uses the "inverted pyramid" method, putting the most important and newest information into the first paragraph. These are usually the five "Ws" and "H": "Who, what, when, where, why and how". This should be followed by supporting information.
- Includes pithy quotes from senior people about why the issue is significant (e.g. "When girls get HPV vaccine today, we are protecting an entire generation of girls from cervical cancer.")
- Short: about 1 page; with short paragraphs of 2-3 sentences each
- Uses plain language and avoids jargon or acronyms
- Can be accompanied by photo or video material
- Should include contact details at the bottom
- Should be coordinated with partners in advance so that everyone agrees and has signed off on the material.

Tips for spokespeople

Who can be a spokesperson?

- A senior expert, with credibility on the issue. The public tend to trust experts more than politicians
- Able to translate sometimes difficult science into simpler messages
- Calm, eloquent, and quick on their feet
- Trustworthy demeanour; eye contact, good posture, warm and not hostile
- Responsive to media needs



Tips for a spokesperson

- Know your material and practice it
- Ensure senior partners agree with your approach and messages
- Your messages should be humanizing – skip acronyms, words like “populations” and “targets” and talk instead about people
- Know, and stay on message
- Be familiar with techniques to come back to message (eg. bridging: “that’s an important issue, but the main thing here is to remember is “x”)
- Be honest. If you don’t know the answer, say so and then call the reporter back later to provide the information.
- Never lie. Your lie will be discovered.
- Acknowledge challenges and explain what action you’re taking to solve them. “Everything is under control” is not a credible message. “We understand the public’s concerns, and we’re working to resolve the issues by X, X and X” is much better.
- Stay calm, even when challenged.
- Return phone calls from partners and media before their deadline.

