

# MEDIA STRATEGIES

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NCJW<sup>®</sup>

National Council of Jewish Women

## ASSESS THE NEWS: WEIGH THE NEWSWORTHINESS OF YOUR STORY

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Before you pitch a story to a reporter or send out a press release, it pays to honestly assess the newsworthiness of your idea. Reporters get hundreds of pitches and releases each day — yours will stand out (and establish your credibility) only if it has real news potential.

So what makes a story newsworthy? There's no single answer. Decisions about what makes it into the newspaper or onto the evening news are based on a number of factors — timing, novelty, human interest, controversy, importance to the community — and can be complicated. Use the following checklist to assess the newsworthiness of your story. Before you pitch a story, you need to be able to check off at least one item. However, the more you can check, the more likely your pitch is to succeed.

### Newsworthiness Checklist

- Is the story brand-new? Is this the first time this event/occurrence has happened in the community? Is it pioneering?
- Does the story contain an unusual or surprising twist?
- Does the story give a fresh local outlook on a national story?
- Does the story shed light on a complex issue?
- Does the story contain a compelling human-interest angle?
- Is the story a “News You Can Use” item, with practical information for people in the community?
- Does the story fit into a topic that the media automatically write about, such as a holiday observance, an annual event, or a political issue?
- Does the story contain unusual or rich visuals?
- Does the story offer a new or celebrity voice on an issue?

After you've completed the checklist, you can use it to help craft your pitch or press release. In both instances, you want to emphasize from the beginning what makes your story newsworthy in order to capture a reporter's attention. (For more information on pitching, see ***Sell the News***. For more information on creating a press release, see ***Read Me***.)

## SELL THE NEWS: PITCH A STORY TO A REPORTER

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Perhaps you have been in this situation: You have a great idea for a news story — but the prospect of convincing a reporter to cover it is daunting. The following tips will help you to identify pitching opportunities, select a pitching target, develop and deliver a pitch, and follow up successfully.

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**Make sure the story is newsworthy.** Reporters are busy, and nothing annoys them more than having their time wasted. Reporters do not want to cover the same old story that everyone else is covering or that they themselves have already covered. Track the work of the reporter you are targeting, gauge his or her interests, and note the stories he or she has done recently. Your story should be something entirely new or present a fresh angle on an existing issue. (See **Assess the News** for more information.)

**Know your audience.** Your pitch will be successful only if you deliver it to the right person. Identifying that person depends on the medium, as well as the kind of story you are pitching.

- ▶ **Newspaper.** Jewish newspapers and other small community newspapers tend to have small staffs. The best person to receive your pitch is likely the news or features editor. At larger papers, you will want to find the reporter covering the appropriate beat for your story, or even consider a columnist. Again, the best approach is to read the paper and track the coverage — after a few days or weeks, it will be easy to recognize who covers what. Beyond a single pitch or story, it's a good idea to know the reporters who are likely to cover your issues so that you can build a relationship with them.
- ▶ **Radio.** Consider pursuing news coverage at a National Public Radio affiliate or local news/talk station. For a public radio station, you may want to target a specific reporter who covers a beat related to your issue. Some stations may have an assignment editor, and you can always go to the news editor. If there is a particular show that you want to target, direct your pitch to the show's producer. Be sure to listen to the program that you are pitching to get a good sense of the kinds of stories that are likely to be covered.

Daytime news coverage on music radio stations tends to be minimal. If you have a breaking story, you can pitch the news director to include it in the station's regular news briefs. Keep in mind that many stations have weekend or late-night public affairs shows that explore news and community issues. These shows, generally produced and/or hosted by the news or public affairs director, are good targets for a pitch of an in-depth look at your issue.

- ▶ **Television.** Television stations are interested in breaking news stories with strong visual angles. Sometimes they also air investigative features that expose injustice or take a close look at community issues. If you know that news is going to break sometime soon, pitch the futures editor. (Providing the media with advance notice almost always increases your chance of getting coverage.) If your story is already breaking news, pitch the assignment editor.

For a feature story that doesn't concern breaking news, identify the most appropriate reporter or producer by paying attention to the beats they cover. Then you can make contacts directly.

**Craft a creative pitch.** Reporters are constantly besieged by phone calls, emails, and faxes from people trying to convince them to write stories. You need to stand out from the crowd. This means deciding on the best means of contact — usually email or phone — and developing a pitch that is attention-grabbing and brief.

- ▶ **Phone.** If you're going to pitch by phone, plan what you will say in advance. Most reporters will give you 15 seconds — maybe 30 — to make your case. Make those seconds count. Avoid overwhelming them with jargon. Use a striking fact, or mention the name of a prominent person available for an interview. If they're interested, they'll keep listening.
- ▶ **Email.** The same rules apply for an email pitch — except that a reporter can delete it without ever reading it. Create an interesting subject line and make sure the first few sentences of your email are attention-grabbing. Don't write a novel — one to three brief paragraphs will do it. Let the reporter know that you will call to follow up — don't leave it up to a reporter to contact you.

Do not send documents as attachments. Many email accounts are set up to block emails with attachments. Even if the messages do get through, many journalists won't open attachments from unknown email addresses. Try to include anything that you need to communicate in the body of the email. If you are trying to share a lengthy document with a reporter, post the document online and provide the reporter with a web address to view the piece.

**Plan a strong delivery.** Whether you're pitching the reporter by phone, or following up on your email pitch, consider your timing. Do not call a reporter in the late afternoon when he or she is likely to be on deadline. If you reach a reporter who sounds harried, ask when it would be a better time to call back. Plan and practice your pitch and deliver it with confidence — but don't read it. Ask if the reporter is interested, and offer to share additional information. A reporter will rarely agree to do a story during your first call, so your goal should be to start the conversation. Be prepared to leave a brief, to-the-point voicemail (30 seconds or less) if you do not reach a live person.

**Follow up — but don't pester.** If you've spoken to a reporter, shared additional resources, and haven't heard anything, give a call or send a follow-up email. Ask the reporter if he or she is going to do the story or if anything else is needed to help reach a decision. Even if your pitch is rejected, ask if you can stay in touch as things develop. Your efforts now may pay dividends later. If your pitch is accepted, offer to help in any way that you can (identifying spokespeople, providing background information, etc.). After the story runs, send an email or note of thanks.

## READ ME: WRITE AN EFFECTIVE PRESS RELEASE

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Reporters receive hundreds of press releases each day. Your challenge is to make yours stand out from the crowd so that it actually gets read. In a nutshell, a press release is a brief news story that gives reporters key details about a piece of news. (See the **Press Release Template** for more information).

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**Make sure your release is newsworthy.** Only send out a press release when you have actual news to report. For example, a press release is appropriate to announce a newly installed officer, the results of a successful program or event, etc. And it needs to be released immediately after the news happens. (For more information, see **Assess the News**.)

**Attract attention with a strong headline.** The headline is what a reporter reads first and determines if he or she will keep reading. The headline should give the most newsworthy angle of your story in no more than 12 words, mostly strong nouns and active verbs. Avoid the overused “X organization announces” headline — it’s nearly a guarantee that a reporter will ignore the rest of the release.

**Consider using a sub-headline.** Because the headline is so short, the sub-headline (also called the dek) allows you to offer another piece of information that will sell your story. This is valuable real estate, so avoid repeating words from the headline. The dek takes the form of one full sentence, no more than 15 words, without any ending punctuation.

**Tell the story in the lede.** The lede, or first paragraph of the release, needs to answer the questions “What happened?” and “Why should anyone care?” in one to two sentences. Stick to factual statements that are not loaded with fluffy adjectives. This is where you get the reporter to commit to reading the rest of your release.

**Flesh out the body with key details.** The remaining paragraphs of your release will add the important details of your story. Here’s where to address or expand on the who, what, when, where, and why of your story, with an emphasis on its impact on the community. Keep paragraphs relatively short, two to three sentences, and your overall length to one page.

**Include quotes from key spokespeople.** Within the body of your release, include one to three quotes. People quoted may include a local leader, member, or outside validator (a prominent member of the community, for example). Reporters may use these quotes directly. Ensure that the quotes sound natural — as if they were actually spoken — by saying them aloud.

**Use letterhead and boilerplate text to identify NCJW.** Consistent use of letterhead and boilerplate text (short text at the bottom of a release that describes NCJW) will help journalists know the source of the release. It will also save you from using valuable space in the body of the release.

**Always include contact information.** Near the top of the release, include a name, phone number, and email address of a person whom a reporter can easily contact for additional information.

National Council of Jewish Women  
Sample Section  
Street Address  
City, State Zip Code

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Month XX, 20XX

**Contact:**

Name

XXX XXX XXXX; name@ncjwsection.org

Include a 24-hour phone number.

**STRONG HEADLINES CAPTURE MEDIA ATTENTION**

The headline should be no more than 12 words. Use bold font, 2-3 points larger than body text.

**New research reveals reporters rely on dek for key information**

The sub-headline (or dek) should be no more than 15 words. Use bold font, 1 point larger than body text.

City, State — **The first paragraph is the lede or main news.** This is what is happening and why it is important, in one to two sentences.

**The second paragraph is everything important that did not fit in the first paragraph.**

After reading the lede and the second paragraph, a reporter should know the who, what, where, when, and why of your news, as well as the so what.

“The third paragraph is **a passionate quote** from the best messenger,” said Jane Smith, president of the National Council of Jewish Women Sample Section. “It is usually two parts and may state the problem and a solution or action.”

The first quote in a release is generally from an organization’s lead spokesperson. Make sure it sounds natural and adds value to the story.

In the **next two paragraphs**, share details that flesh out the story. Provide the larger context to this issue, including any relevant history. Consider using this paragraph to debunk myths or correct misinformation.

The goal of these two paragraphs is to give the reporter everything he or she needs to write the story. This is a good place for important facts, a key statistic, or even a brief anecdote.

“If space permits, use **another quote** here,” the instructors said. “This will be important when working in a partnership or coalition.”

One or two additional quotes in the release can come from allies, an event speaker, a member, etc. You can also include a second quote from your primary spokesperson.

From here, expand your story by including information that was not essential to grab the reporter’s attention, but is critical to understanding the story. Ideally a release is one page, though it may extend to two if necessary.

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These marks indicate the end of the press release.

NCJW is a volunteer organization, inspired by Jewish values, that works to improve the quality of life for women, children, and families and to ensure individual rights and freedoms for all through its network of 90,000 members, supporters, and volunteers nationwide.

This is the boilerplate. Use it to include standard information about NCJW.

## STAY ON MESSAGE: ACE AN INTERVIEW

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It happens time and again: Intelligent, informed, qualified spokespeople speak to a member of the press and suddenly find themselves “off message” — veering away from the key points that they want to make. The reporters are in control of the conversation, rather than the spokespeople.

Media interviews are an important part of an overall communications outreach campaign. As a key spokesperson, you have the power to shape the public conversation that takes place on your issue.

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**Prepare, prepare, prepare.** A journalist spends substantial time considering what type of story he or she is looking to write before ever speaking to anyone. When a journalist comes to you, be ready. Even CEOs, politicians, and celebrities — people with large communications staffs who constantly interact with the press — can go off message and say things that are unclear (or worse, regrettable) if they fail to prepare properly.

- ▶ **Familiarize yourself with the journalist and media outlet before your interview.** Have they covered this story in the past? Do they tend to cover stories from a particular point of view? Asking the right questions in advance will improve your answers later. (See the *Pre-Interview Log Sheet* for more information.)
- ▶ **Know what you want to say.** Your expertise might enable you to discuss endless aspects of your issue but only one, *maybe two*, points will make it into a story, and even then the audience may only remember bits and pieces. Review your messages in advance; select one or two key points and commit to making them well.
- ▶ **Anticipate the questions you might be asked and prepare brief responses that deliver your message.** There is a difference between answering a question directly and responding to one with the key points that you want to convey. You can respond to nearly any question in a way that incorporates your key messages.

**Share your message.** You may be nervous, but your goal should be to sound calm and confident.

- ▶ **Collect your thoughts.** If a journalist calls and wants to conduct an on-the-spot interview, ask if you can call him or her back in five minutes. Use that time to gather your thoughts and review your key points.
- ▶ **Use notes.** If the interview is on the phone or radio, feel free to keep notes in front of you.
- ▶ **Keep it simple!** Use clear language and avoid jargon. You don't want to bore your audience members or make them feel stupid.
- ▶ **Watch out for “what ifs.”** Don't fall into the trap of speculating on answers to hypothetical questions. Keep the focus on what you do know: your key points.

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- ▶ **Be honest!** Don't stretch the truth. If you don't know the answer, suggest an alternative source or, if you can, offer to research the question and reply later. Anything less than factual and honest answers can seriously damage your credibility, as well as the credibility of your cause and NCJW.
- ▶ **Don't speak on behalf of other groups.** Avoid answering questions or commenting on non-NCJW events, issues, or organizations. Emphasize that you speak for your part of NCJW.
- ▶ **Remember that everything is on the record.** Don't give in to the temptation to tell the reporter something "off the record." If you say it aloud or put it in an email, assume that it will appear in the reporter's story.
- ▶ **Stay calm.** Getting flustered can convey a host of things — none positive! Prepare in advance and stick to your messages, and you'll ace any interview.



## PRE-INTERVIEW LOG SHEET

Log interview requests to ensure that your spokesperson is well-prepared for every opportunity!

Date of request \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer \_\_\_\_\_

Outlet \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

### General Interview Details:

Date/Time \_\_\_\_\_

Length \_\_\_\_\_

Topic \_\_\_\_\_

Spokesperson requested \_\_\_\_\_

What is NCJW's role in the piece? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Is NCJW the focus, or providing background/support? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Who else will be interviewed? \_\_\_\_\_

Is there a typical angle? (progressive, focused on women, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

Is a photo needed? \_\_\_\_\_

### Broadcast Interview Details:

On the phone or in person? \_\_\_\_\_

Live or taped? \_\_\_\_\_

If taped, will it be edited? \_\_\_\_\_

One-on-one or part of a panel? \_\_\_\_\_

Will listeners or viewers call in with questions? \_\_\_\_\_

Will there be a pre-interview opportunity? \_\_\_\_\_

## JUST THE FACTS: WRITE AN EFFECTIVE MEDIA ADVISORY

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A media advisory is a brief, one-page notice that alerts the media to an upcoming event. Sending a strong media advisory before a press conference or public event can entice and encourage reporters to publicize the event and NCJW's work.

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**Make sure your advisory is newsworthy.** Only send out an advisory when you have a compelling event to announce. For daily publications, send the advisory via email and/or fax three to four days prior to the event. For weeklies, send the information a few weeks ahead. And for all media, follow up shortly before the event. (For more information, see **Assess the News** and **Maximize Media Attendance**.)

**Follow press release rules for headlines and deks.** Just as with a press release, a media advisory needs a strong, attention-grabbing headline and a dek that offers additional information that will convince a reporter to cover your event. (For more information on crafting your headline and dek, see **Read Me**.)

**Use the lede to introduce your event.** Immediately following the headline and dek, but before you give the event details, include a one- to two-sentence paragraph that introduces your event and explains why it is newsworthy. Are you launching a new, innovative, or pioneering program? Is there a local or national celebrity involved? Are you delivering a petition with 3,000 signatures to a policy maker? In the lede, highlight the most important feature of your event (the why), and who is behind the event (your NCJW group).

If you choose, you can also include a quote from your lead spokesperson. Do this only if it enhances the appeal of your event by sharing a key, newsworthy detail.

**Highlight the event details.** The rest of your advisory should clearly lay out the details of your event, including what is happening, when, and where. Follow up with a list of speakers or any other key details.

**Use letterhead and boilerplate text to identify NCJW.** Consistent use of letterhead and boilerplate text (short text at the bottom of an advisory that describes NCJW) will help journalists know the source of the advisory. It will also save you from using valuable space in the body of the advisory.

**Always include contact information.** Near the top of the release, include a name, phone number, and email address of a person whom a reporter can easily contact for additional information.

National Council of Jewish Women  
Sample Section  
Street Address  
City, State Zip Code

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Month XX, 20XX

**Contact:**

Name

XXX XXX XXXX; name@ncjwsection.org

Include a 24-hour phone number.

**Media Advisory for Date, Time**

List the date and time of the event.

**STRONG HEADLINES CAPTURE MEDIA ATTENTION**

The headline should be no more than 12 words. Use bold font, 2-3 points larger than body text.

**New research reveals reporters rely on dek for key information**

The sub-headline (or dek) should be no more than 15 words. Use bold font, 1 point larger than body text.

City, State — **The first paragraph is the lede.** In one to two sentences, introduce the event and highlight its most important feature to demonstrate why it is newsworthy.

“A quote here can explain the purpose of the event,” said Jane Smith, president of the National Council of Jewish Women Sample Section. “It may also offer a preview of what will happen and needs to focus on adding key details that will sell the event to reporters.”

This quote is optional — include it only if it will help convince a reporter to attend.

**What:** Name of event

Followed by a brief description if necessary

**When:** Date and time of event

**Where:** Location

Include directions and parking and public transit information here if needed

**Speakers:** Speaker name, Organization

Speaker name, Organization

Speaker name, Organization

###

These marks indicate the end of the media advisory.

NCJW is a volunteer organization, inspired by Jewish values, that works to improve the quality of life for women, children, and families and to ensure individual rights and freedoms for all through its network of 90,000 members, supporters, and volunteers nationwide.

This is the boilerplate. Use it to include standard information about NCJW.

## MAXIMIZE MEDIA ATTENDANCE: HOLD A SUCCESSFUL PRESS CONFERENCE

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It is appropriate to hold a press conference when you have significant hard news to release and want to convey it to a broad audience. However, in order to be successful, a press conference must be well-organized and present this information clearly and concisely.

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### The Logistics

- ▶ **Pick an easily accessible site.** Your location should be convenient for the media to access and, when possible, relevant to the news you have to announce. There should be enough space for the anticipated number of reporters, as well as any invited guests. Remember to obtain a permit in advance, if needed. Post signs to guide people to the press conference area.
- ▶ **Hold it at the right time.** Timing is very important for press conferences. The best choices for coverage are usually Tuesday through Thursday, in the late morning or early afternoon (between 10 am and 2 pm), so that reporters can meet their deadlines. Avoid competing with other events happening at the same time as your event; contact your local Associated Press wire bureau to find out what is on its “daybook” — a listing of events happening in a particular area on a particular day.
- ▶ **Make it visual.** Consider the visual impact of your event — especially for photographers and television cameras. Display a banner behind the speakers and on the podium. Be sure these are easy to read, on message, and on brand — featuring NCJW blue and green, Gill Sans, and the correct NCJW logo.
- ▶ **Create a media-friendly set-up.** The set-up should include a podium and, typically, a microphone for the speakers to use when delivering their comments. Depending on your venue, you can also provide chairs for the speakers and/or attendees. Be sure the media have an unobstructed view of the speakers. And if the press conference is indoors, remember to leave a clear space and access to electricity for television cameras at the back of the room.
- ▶ **Have an audience.** If space permits, invite your members and allies to attend, so they can be part of your work and also help share your message.

### The Media

- ▶ **Invite the media.** For daily publications, send out a media advisory via email and/or fax three to four days before the press conference. Make sure to include wire services (such as the Associated Press and the Jewish Telegraphic Agency) that have daybooks. For weekly publications, it’s helpful to send information a few weeks ahead. And for all media, be sure to place a reminder call one or two days before the event.

- ▶ **Prepare take-away materials.** Prepare a press kit to hand out to media representatives at the event. Contents of this kit could include fact sheets, a press release, biographies of the speakers, charts, *NCJW Journals*, or brochures. Avoid overwhelming the media with too much paper — include only vital information that a reporter must have to write his or her story.
- ▶ **Greet the media.** Secure a table where you can welcome media representatives and have them complete a sign-in sheet with their contact information. This sheet will help you track which media outlets attended and provide easy access for any follow-up. It is important to have everything ready at least 30 minutes prior to the start of your press conference. The media will often arrive early to arrange equipment and review the press kit.

## The Program

- ▶ **Use a moderator.** You should select a moderator who can introduce the speakers and facilitate a Q&A session with reporters. The moderator can also control the process and keep reporters on the subject. If a reporter digresses, the moderator can return the focus by saying such things as, “That is an interesting point, but we are here today to discuss ...”
- ▶ **Prepare your speakers.** Usually, you should select no more than two to three people to speak. Each speaker should relay a specific part of the message — reporters do not need or want to hear multiple speakers repeating the same things. Speakers should practice prior to the press conference so they are well prepared and able to stay on message.
- ▶ **Have an agenda.** Start promptly. It is unprofessional to keep the media waiting. The moderator should introduce the speakers, and then each speaker should talk for no more than five minutes. Keeping the speakers to a short amount of time will help ensure they stay on message. The moderator should then facilitate a short Q&A session with journalists. The entire press conference should not last more than one hour, including the Q&A.
- ▶ **Arrange individual interviews after the conference.** Reporters often want one-on-one interviews with speakers after the Q&A period. This is a chance to clarify or cover information not brought out in the Q&A; however, speakers need to continue to stay on message and keep their answers short and direct.
- ▶ **Follow up.** Make sure someone is available to respond to questions that reporters might have after the press conference ends. Send thank-you notes to attendees, reminding them whom to contact for further information. And distribute press kits to key media representatives who were unable to attend.

## BEYOND THE PRESS CONFERENCE: STAGE A CREATIVE EVENT

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Though a press conference is a useful means to communicate news, it is also possible — and often preferable — to use an event to garner media coverage of an issue. A successful event will attract media attention and serve as an effective vehicle for communicating with key audiences.

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**Be creative.** The media are attracted to active and compelling events. Don't have a group of people gather inside a room if they can march on the street holding signs instead. Examples of newsworthy events include:

- ▶ Rallies/marches/demonstrations
- ▶ Legislative visits
- ▶ Award programs
- ▶ Petition drives
- ▶ Expert or celebrity appearances
- ▶ Fundraising events, such as anniversary galas
- ▶ Community action events, such as filling backpacks for needy schoolchildren or collecting toiletries for domestic abuse survivors

**Invite ideas.** The best media events often come from several minds. Brainstorm to generate the most promising event themes, speaker suggestions, program ideas, and outreach strategies.

**Select an accessible location.** Choose a location that will be convenient for the media. And be sure to get all necessary permissions and permits to use the space.

**Maximize visual appeal.** Consider the visual elements of your site — these are critical to photographers and television reporters. If you must have a “talking head,” place him or her in front of a symbolic location linked to the issue you are addressing (e.g., if you are discussing reproductive rights, hold your event outside a women's health clinic). Prominently display signs and banners. Make sure they are easy to read, on message, and on brand — featuring NCJW blue and green, Gill Sans, and the correct NCJW logo. Show the action to tell the story. In the examples above, visuals of NCJW members filling backpacks with school supplies or suitcases with toiletries would likely appeal to media.

**Prep key participants.** Designate key participants as spokespeople and make sure they are clear about the purpose and messages of the event. If you are holding an event like a rally or demonstration, provide participants with a one-page summary of your key messages as they arrive. This way, if a reporter speaks with a participant, he or she can be on message.

**Link your event to observances/holidays.** The media are often looking for fresh news related to recurring events such as Women's History Month (March) or Jewish holidays. Plan an event to capitalize on the media's need.

**Alert the media.** Improve your publicity potential by distributing a media advisory to daily and weekly press. (For more information, see **Maximize Media Attendance.**)

## OPINIONS COUNT: WRITE AND SUBMIT AN OP-ED

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Op-ed is an abbreviation for “opposite the editorial page” and can denote both the page itself and the opinion pieces that a newspaper publishes on it. Newspapers generally have a stable of op-ed columnists and regular contributors, but most also print op-eds written by outside authors.

Editors may choose to publish op-eds that express a different opinion than those expressed in editorials to balance coverage of an issue. Other times op-eds are selected for their unique response or fresh perspective on a current event or news story.

Simply put, op-eds express the opinion of the author on a particular issue, and can offer an excellent opportunity to advance your messages. Knowing the basics of writing and submitting an op-ed can increase your chances of getting published.

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**Follow the rules.** All newspapers have guidelines for op-ed submissions that generally include a maximum word count (usually 600–750 words), exclusivity rules (requiring that an op-ed only be submitted to one paper in the country or in a specific region), and instructions for how to submit the piece.

It’s important to adhere to an outlet’s guidelines, particularly exclusivity. Failing to do so will likely cause your submission to be rejected, no matter how well written it is. Many newspapers post guidelines on their websites. If not, call the editorial assistant or op-ed editor. While you have him or her on the phone, introduce yourself, share your idea, and ask if it would be a good fit for the paper.

**Submit the write stuff.** *New York Times* op-ed editor David Shipley wrote an article about how *The Times* selects op-eds. He looks for timeliness, ingenuity, strength of argument, freshness of opinion, clear writing, and newsworthiness. When writing your op-ed, keep the following in mind:

- ▶ **Focus.** Don’t try to do too much. It’s better to develop and support one argument thoroughly, with plenty of detail, than to try to cover several more generally. By trying to say everything, you may end up saying nothing.
- ▶ **Support.** Your opinion needs to be supported by hard facts and, if possible, powerful statistics. This will give your op-ed weight and enable it to stand up to criticism. Be careful, though, that you do not overload your op-ed with numbers. Three to four key facts or statistics is ideal.
- ▶ **Illustrate.** A well-chosen personal story or real-life example will give life to your argument and demonstrate the human consequences of your issue.

- ▶ **Speak plainly.** You may be tempted to put jargon into your op-ed. Resist the temptation! Write as if you were talking to a friend or neighbor. For a clear argument, use everyday language.

**Include NCJW.** You can enhance the credibility of your op-ed by including information about NCJW, either in the body of the op-ed or in the brief description of the author that appears at the end.

**Edit, edit, edit.** Make sure that your submission does not contain slang, acronyms, or grammar or spelling errors. Ask someone else to read it for clarity.

**Submit and follow up.** Submit your op-ed, following the newspaper's instructions for doing so.

If you don't hear anything after several days, follow up with the op-ed editor to see if your submission is under consideration. Ask if there are any revisions that you could make to increase its chances of being published.

If the piece is accepted, work with the newspaper to edit it as needed. And save a copy once it is printed. The life of an op-ed is not over once it appears in a newspaper. Distribute copies of the op-ed to any interested individuals — potential members, supporters, donors, and coalition partners.

If the piece is rejected, ask the op-ed editor how you can improve future submissions. Newspapers sometimes commission op-eds, so developing a relationship with the editor can improve your future chances. Also, if it is still timely, consider submitting the piece to another newspaper.



## TALK BACK: WRITE AND SUBMIT A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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Writing a letter to the editor is one of the best ways to respond to articles, editorials, or op-eds published in your local paper. You can submit a letter to amplify a positive editorial, mitigate the damage caused by a harmful op-ed, or highlight key information left out of an article.

But remember to choose your “battles” wisely — even though this is a more personal message, stick to the facts, keep emotions in check, and never disparage other individuals or organizations.

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**Respond quickly.** Timeliness is key. After you identify a story or editorial that needs a response, draft and submit your letter as soon as possible.

**Read the letters section.** Read letters to the editor published recently and mirror their format.

**Follow the rules.** Look for guidelines about format, length, and other submission requirements on the paper’s website or in the paper near the letters section. If you can’t find them, call the newspaper and ask.

**Be brief.** Keep your letter short and to the point. Focus on making one key point in two or three paragraphs, and use just a couple of key facts or statistics, or a very brief story, to support your argument. Aim for about 150 words — never more than 200.

**Include NCJW.** You can enhance the credibility of your letter by including information about NCJW, either in the body of the letter or when you identify yourself as the letter writer.

**Edit!** Proofread carefully to eliminate typos and grammatical errors. And be sure to avoid jargon and acronyms.

## KEEP CLIP FILES: TRACK AND USE MEDIA COVERAGE

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Monitoring the news is a vital part of any successful communications effort. Tracking “clips” — actual newspaper clippings or tapes and transcripts of television or radio interviews — will help you to augment your media relations and increase your visibility.

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**Follow important issues to learn the facts.** Media coverage of key issues that NCJW works on can help you to:

- ▶ **Create pitches to reporters.** Tracking the news on a regular basis will provide you with an awareness of what stories specific reporters cover, as well as what type of public conversation is taking place on your issues. When it comes time for you to pitch a reporter or speak to an editorial board, you'll be well informed and able to tailor your comments to suit a reporter's need for a new angle or fresh perspective.
- ▶ **Identify opportunities to enter the discussion.** Consistent media tracking will alert you to opportunities to write letters to the editor or submit op-eds. It can even provide you with fodder to schedule an editorial board meeting (a meeting that will enable you to share NCJW's insights with newspaper contacts who determine editorial positions).
- ▶ **Build a file of background research.** Media clips on your issues can provide you with useful background information that can assist in developing speeches, fact sheets, etc.

**Increase visibility by sharing published clips on NCJW.** Track media coverage that mentions or profiles local NCJW activities, and put that coverage to work to increase your visibility among donors, members, and key stakeholders in your community.

- ▶ **Members.** Media clips can be shared with members to let them know the latest local NCJW news. They can be included as inserts in newsletters, emailed to electronic mailing lists, or mailed directly to those people who are already engaged in your work.
- ▶ **Donors.** Media clips can also be a key part of the materials you share with current or potential donors. They provide independent validation of your work.
- ▶ **Policymakers.** If you want to ensure local, state, or national policymakers are aware of NCJW's work or position on a particular issue, share key media clips with policymakers and their staff via mail or email.

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**Track media coverage on NCJW easily and inexpensively.** There are a number of simple ways to track media coverage of your issues and your local NCJW work. The key to successful tracking is to do it consistently, ideally on a daily basis.

- ▶ **Subscribe to the local newspaper, or read it online.** Each day, scan the paper for articles relating to NCJW and its issues. Cut out or print and file relevant articles. (It's a good idea to file the original newspaper clippings for any stories you successfully pitch — photocopies of these originals will be more attractive than articles printed from a website when included in a press kit.)
- ▶ **Do a weekly search of larger newspapers in your state.** Consider using keyword searches on the websites of larger, regional newspapers to track key issues and NCJW press. Most newspaper sites include search engines on their home pages. Try to search once a week — most newspapers allow their stories from the past week to be viewed for free, but may charge a fee for older articles. A good resource for finding daily and weekly newspapers online is the [www.newsvoyager.com/voyager.cfm](http://www.newsvoyager.com/voyager.cfm) website.
- ▶ **Set up a recurring national search in Google News.** Google offers a free news tracking service called “news alerts” or “google alerts” at [www.news.google.com](http://www.news.google.com). Through it you can establish a recurring keyword search related to NCJW issues and events. And Google will email links to relevant news stories to you on a daily basis.