



NATIONAL
GOVERNORS
ASSOCIATION

COVID Collaborative

“MASK UP” LOCAL PRESS OUTREACH GUIDE

Introduction

Media in its many forms — including television, newspapers, radio, websites, and social media platforms — is a powerful and useful tool for delivering critical public service messaging. The CDC and Ad Council have experienced first-hand the power of partnering with the media as part of their ongoing Coronavirus efforts, which launched in the days immediately following the World Health Organization’s declaration of the Coronavirus pandemic.

As your state seeks to raise awareness about the importance of wearing face masks, knowing how to best use and work effectively with the media is important to making your communication efforts successful.

We know that your state faces daily demands and constraints as you work so stop the spread of Coronavirus in your area. Below are some tips for partnering with the media on this campaign.

Key Considerations and Principles for Working with the Media

Understand the Current Media Environment

As you look for ways to establish connections with various media contacts, it’s helpful to understand the media’s priorities, goals, constraints, and pressures so that you can find mutually beneficial ways to partner. When working with the media, it’s important to keep in mind that:

- The media landscape in the midst of the pandemic is as competitive as ever. There are a multitude of media choices available — that are literally at the audience’s fingertips.
- Media outlets receive hundreds of press releases and media advisories each day from groups seeking media attention.
- Media companies face tight budgets and fierce competition. Today’s reporters are deadline-driven, stressed, curious, intelligent, and thrive on playing a “watch-dog” role.

Be Aware of the Media’s Goals

Recognize that your goals in working with the media are very different from the media’s goals in working with you. While you may want the media to highlight information about local data about Coronavirus, the media are often looking for drama or a compelling storyline to keep their readers and audiences interested and engaged. Media outlets report the news, but they also help create the news by deciding on what to report.

Approach the media from the viewpoint of wanting to help them tell the best story possible. For example, emphasize the local impact Coronavirus is having on your area and community.

Be Clear About Your Goals and Your “Ask”

Just like you, media staff are busy and trying to manage multiple responsibilities and deadlines — they will appreciate a clear, well-defined request. By thinking through precisely what you'd like from the media (e.g., to cover a specific story idea, promotion of a specific virtual event in the community, etc.), you increase the likelihood of a media partnership opportunity.

Develop Clear Messages

Move beyond thinking about what messages you want to share with the public and develop messages that will resonate with audiences who aren't as well-educated on the impact of Coronavirus or the steps to take to slow its spread. Whatever form of media you are using — television, radio, newspapers, online platforms, etc. — you'll need to fit your messages into limited space and time.

Using the NGA Coronavirus Campaign Materials to Support Your Work

Why Should Our State Use the Materials from the Campaign?

Many states want to develop high-quality, effective awareness Covid-19 campaigns but struggle to find the resources they need to create such a campaign. A cost-effective solution to this issue is to leverage the NGA Coronavirus materials to raise awareness in your community about the importance of wearing face masks.

The campaign creative:

- is professionally produced by an industry-leading advertising agency in partnership with the CDC, the Ad Council and the Infectious Diseases Society of America.
- Has been substantiated by a robust creative strategy and extensive research.
- Uses positioning that resonates well with our intended target audience as well as with media outlets.
- is a non-profit, non-partisan and will be supported in time and space donated by the media.

Specific Strategies for Increasing the Local Impact of the Coronavirus NGA Campaign

The local media play an influential role in every community. By working with the media in your area, you can help increase the reach and impact of the NGA's Coronavirus effort, which can help your state's efforts to control Coronavirus. Specific strategies include:

- Use multiple media vehicles, including both traditional and social media platforms, to reach our identified target audiences at the local level.
- Engage in local media outreach efforts. Media outlets and leaders have a strong preference for covering local issues that affect people and the communities they live in.
- Localize the issue, explaining to your audience why Coronavirus matters at the local level and why there should be broad interest in slowing its spread in your community. Put Coronavirus in a local context by highlighting local data and stories of those impacted.
- Use your expertise. You know your state better than most -- use your knowledge to provide local context. You can best articulate how Coronavirus has affected the community. Tell the stories the media will be interested in featuring for its audiences.

- Build lasting relationships with local media contacts. Provide the media with a familiar name and face and an expert for them to turn to about the local impact of Coronavirus. Do your homework and reach out to the reporter that you believe will be interested based on previous coverage.
- Highlight the availability of spokespeople who can put a personal face on Coronavirus and offer expertise.

Conducting Media Outreach

The following tips will help you increase the effectiveness of your outreach efforts.

Identify and Prioritize Your Best Media Prospects

- Focus on TV and radio stations and local newspapers — or local editions of newsmagazines — with programming and content that appeals to the target.
- Monitor local media for coverage of related stories and key contacts.
- Visit media websites to learn more about the community groups and issues they support. Media entities often have established partnerships and designated charities or issues they support exclusively; knowing if media outlets already have exclusive commitments or if they have expressed interest in a particular issue area can help you prioritize and target your outreach efforts appropriately.
- Target general managers and community affairs directors at the media outlets you contact.

Make an “Ask”

Ask the media outlet to:

- Include content and a link to your agency’s website on the media outlet’s website.
- Promote an upcoming virtual event.

As part of your request, be sure to let the media contact know that you are available as a resource. Reiterate the availability of local experts for interviews and other information for news stories, features, and special reports.

Provide an Information Packet if Available

Your information packet can include items such as:

- Press release
- Fact sheet that includes national, State, and local data
- Bios for spokespeople and experts who are available to talk with the media
- Brochures or other promotional materials
- Human interest story that features a unique Coronavirus story from your area

Close the Loop

- After talking with a media contact, consider sending a thank you note, acknowledging the discussion and expressing appreciation for the meeting.
- A separate thank you is also appropriate when you see the results of a partnership (e.g., media outlet running PSAs or the media supported your local event).
- Follow up to inquire whether the PSA Director or other media contacts need additional information, or has any further questions.

Other Tips for Working with the Media

- Be familiar with all types of media (e.g., newspapers, magazines, television, radio, social media, news websites, etc.). Consider what types of media are most appropriate for the identified target audiences.
- Be alert. Stay on top of breaking news that relates to Coronavirus.
- Be accessible to the media. Respond to requests promptly.
- Respect deadlines and follow up as necessary.
- Provide accurate and complete information. Be able to cite reputable sources for the facts you provide.
- Provide examples and illustrations of facts and figures when possible (as long as it doesn't muddy your overall messaging) – stories tend to catch a reporter's attention more than numbers, and you never know which story may resonate with them.
- Keep your messaging consistent, succinct, and simple. Focus on three to five key messages and remember that your audience likely doesn't know specific Coronavirus terms, so keep your messages in simple, clear language. Avoid using jargon or acronyms.
- Respond to all of the media's questions. Responding to questions from the media with "no comment" is not appropriate. Try using these statements instead:
 - "I don't know, but I can find out."
 - "That's an important question/issue/concern, but what I would really like to talk about today is...."
- Respect exclusivity. If you offer an exclusive story to a reporter, follow through with that reporter and don't share the story with other media outlets.
- Use professional imagery and photos when possible.
- Proofread all of your information before passing it along to the media. Make sure that your information is accurate and as up-to-date as possible.
- Use an active (not passive) voice in your writing and messages. By using an active voice you set a more positive, engaging tone.
- Follow up with reporters to offer new information, or an additional story angle, not just to see if they received information.
- Assume you are always on the record when communicating with the media. Avoid using sarcasm as reporters may take you literally.
- Praise good work! If a reporter has written a good, accurate story, send a note of thanks with a copy to their editor.