



Handling the Media

Capturing Their Interest as a Nonprofit - and Keeping It

By Abby Turpin, Keep America Beautiful Director of Communications, and former television news anchor/reporter/exec. producer

Part 1: Getting the Interview

1. Get to know your local media if you don't already.
 - Don't be nervous to personally email your local news anchors and reporters that you see each day on your television screen. They *want* you to reach out to them about a story idea for your nonprofit organization. That's why they're journalists! A personal email or call from you, explaining your affiliate's work and why it's important, will get a lot more attention than just a general press release about an event. Reporters and anchors get countless press releases and emails every day. Take the time to personalize an email or pick up the phone and call the newsroom.
2. Make sure the media has the opportunity to *really* get to know you and your affiliate's work.
 - Just inviting media to an event is not enough. You need to "sell" KAB, your affiliate, and your event to them. Even at the local level, journalists are generating multiple stories every day from members of the community and on their own, and they typically are expected to pitch their top 3 story ideas to their news director each day. One gets chosen. What makes your event/news the top story they should want to cover? What makes it stand out?
 - I asked a former colleague in the news business to weigh in on this list. This is what he said: "Why do I care and why is what you have to give me important enough for us to put a reporter on it? The threshold is high for a nonprofit to get coverage, especially in a big market, when so many time -

sensitive stories happen daily. Give me a specific stat that stops me in my tracks or tell me something incredibly unique about your event that makes it a 'must' to cover."

3. Visuals are everything.
 - If you email a reporter about your upcoming event or send out a press release, include some visuals. For example, include photos from last year's GAC event. Show people in action, show the actual results of litter cleanups. Take the reporter to the event through visuals. That'll give them an idea of what to expect, and their wheels will be turning with ideas on how they can cover it in an impactful way.

Part 2: The Interview

1. Be confident. Be proud of who you are and what you represent for your affiliate and KAB.
2. Reporters are trained (or should be) to ask you to say and spell your first and last name at the beginning of an interview. If they don't, make sure they have it right for when they put your name on the screen during a broadcast and in a written story on their website. Details matter.
3. Know your material. You are the spokesperson and the "salesperson" for your affiliate. This is your chance to show your genuine enthusiasm for the mission of KAB and your daily work. Sell people on why they should care to attend an event and get involved. And give details. What time? Where? Reporters must get the story down to just the basics most of the time because of time constraints in a broadcast. Get right to the "meat" of your story/event. Also, yes or no answers with nothing to back it up are a journalist's nightmare. Example:

Not-so-good

Reporter/Anchor: "So, I understand you have a big event coming up this weekend for the Great American Cleanup?"


You: "Yes."

Great!

Reporter/Anchor: "So, I understand you have a big event coming up this weekend for the Great American Cleanup?"

You: "Yes. We couldn't be more thrilled to be hosting a cleanup on Saturday from 10 a.m. to noon at Grace Church on Franklin Rd. in Brentwood. We have all the supplies needed. We just need volunteers!"

4. Remember that your local journalists are local residents, just like you. Your community is their community. Invite them to be a volunteer, to get involved in some way. Don't treat the interview as a one and done just to promote one event. Form a relationship with them so they have a genuine interest in your organization.

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5. Follow up with a thank you email. Reporters/anchors don't hear "thank you" much. Expressing appreciation for them covering your organization's work is important. As you know, reputation matters in a community. They'll be sure to remember you for future coverage of local nonprofit events/news.

Questions? Need help connecting with your local media market?

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