

ALASKA YOUTH FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION

MEDIA TIPS

“The media.” Sounds pretty scary, doesn’t it? Truth is, most people are nervous when working with the media. However, if you follow a few simple guidelines, you’ll be media savvy in no time.

The message

Before you even think about writing a letter, appearing for an interview, or preparing a PSA, you have to have your message clear. This should actually be done as soon as your group has chosen its issue. This way you will always be ready for an unexpected interview.

All messages should have 3 things: a problem, a solution, and an action. Your problem statement should explain what the issue is. For example, air quality in Anchorage is below federal standards for the second year in a row. The solution statement is your end goal for resolving the problem. Your solution in this example would be to raise Anchorage air quality standards. The action is what you want to do, or what you want others to do, to help you reach your goal. In this example, the action may be to stop idling their cars while waiting for their kids to get out of school. Or to buy an engine block heater.

The rules

#1 Stay on message, stay on message, stay on message.

When you are being interviewed, try to answer all the questions with your message. Don’t repeat it word for word or the reporter will think you’ve lost your mind, but try to reword the same basic idea. You will repeat your message over and over until you are tired of it! This is how you know you are saying it enough. If you keep saying the same basic thing, the reporter will have to use it for their highlight. If you stray off topic, and the reporter chooses your irrelevant statement to show on TV, you have lost a valuable media opportunity.

#2 Remember, there is no “off the record.”

A reporter will use whatever you say. The only difference between off the record and on the record is whether or not you are named as the informant. As long as you are staying on message, this should not be a problem.

#3 Don't ever lie to the media.

It may be tempting to make up statistics or exaggerate slightly, but it isn't worth it. The reporter will find out, and you will lose all credibility. If you do not know the answer to a question, tell the reporter the truth, and offer to get back to him/her with the answer. Don't blow this off. If you say you are going to get back to a reporter, do so quickly.

#4 Talking to a reporter is one time when you don't have to say, "thank you."

When a reporter covers your story, he/she is not doing it out of the goodness of his/her heart; he/she is doing it because it is his/her job. If you say, "Thank you for writing that great article," the reporter may wonder whether he/she did a balanced job of reporting. You can say "thank you for your time," but that is enough.

#5 Be considerate.

When you call a reporter, always ask if he/she is "on deadline" or available to speak. If the reporter is working on deadline, ask for a better time to call back. This is greatly appreciated.

The tools

Letter to the Editor

A letter to the editor is probably the simplest way to use media to your advantage. Letters reach a lot of people with a minimum of effort. See AYEА's "Effective Letter Writing" handout for more tips.

Press Advisory

A press advisory is an event teaser. It should include the 5 W's, but not much else. You want the advisory to grab the reporter's attention so he/she will show up and cover it. If you are going to have something special at the event, say so. The advisory should be sent out two days before the event (both days). Call the reporter to confirm receipt and encourage him/her to show up.

Press Release

A press release is your chance to write the perfect article. Be sure to include all of the important information and the quotes you would like used. Put the most important stuff at the beginning. Don't be wordy—keep it to one page. Send this to the press the day of your event (after it takes place). You may send a photo as well. Call to confirm receipt and encourage the reporter to cover the story.

Public Service Announcement (PSA)

A public service announcement is sort of like a free ad. It should be a short statement of your message, or an advertisement for an event. Call your local radio or TV station to get their guidelines. There will be a time limit between 10 and 60 seconds. This may sound short, but it doesn't take as long to say something as you may think. Put a contact name, phone number and address, dates to begin and end airing, and a brief description of the topic.