

How to get local media



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Local media matters

This is a quick guide to getting stories in local media, mainly newspapers.

Local media is one of the best ways to reach people with information about climate change. Research shows people are more concerned about local climate impacts than global impacts.¹

Local media also makes your campaign more powerful. It sends a public message to the people you're targeting and helps build support.

Local newspapers need to produce a lot of content with limited resources – so they're always looking for relevant stories! Plus politicians follow what's in their community newspaper because they get press clippings each morning.

You can follow this step by step guide to get your message out there. It's designed to help you go through the process and have something ready to pitch quickly.

BULLEEN

Not just a way to save on bills



Repower Northeast's **Giuseppe Scelsi** reflects on its first 12 months lobbying for climate-friendly policies.

ALMOST every day, renewable energy projects around the world break a new record for providing the cheapest electricity.

Advances in technology and economies of scale in the past few years have produced a dramatic reduction in costs and an unprecedented proliferation of investments in the renewables sector.

But to the members of Repower Northeast (RNE), renewables are not just a way to save on power bills.

We are particularly concerned about climate change and the real threat to our children and grandchildren.

Achieving a fast switch to renewables is our main hope for preventing the worst consequences of climate change.

Almost exactly one year ago, RNE was formed as part of the "Repower" national campaign that calls for Australia to completely replace coal and gas with renewable electricity by 2030.

RNE's first project was a community survey to probe residents' opinions and attitudes on renewable energy.

They found that more than 80 per cent were in favour of a transition to 100 per cent renewable electricity and supported the Victorian Renewable Energy Target.

After several failed attempts to meet with the state Liberal Bulleen MP Matthew Guy, the group recently managed to meet Opposition energy and resources, innovation and renewables spokesman David Southwick.

Unfortunately, the Coalition

is still determined to repeal the Victorian Renewable Energy Target if elected.

The target is already generating investment, jobs and clean air for Victorians.

Repealing it would be a major step backwards. What we need is for all parties to recognise that the risks involved with climate change are too high for it to be used as a political football.

We need policies to support long-term investment in renewables without the uncertainties of the political cycle.

RNE is encouraged and invigorated by the support shown by the local community and we'll focus on making the transition to 100 per cent renewable energy a prominent talking point for the next state election.



Graham Day, David Southwick, Giuseppe Scelsi, Alison Ray and Cat Nadel at the meeting.

Above: Repower Northeast got this story in their local paper.

¹ Holmes, D and Hall, S (2019) *A literature review of best practice communication of climate science and impacts: Guide for Policy Makers*, Monash Climate Change Communication Research Hub, Melbourne

What do you want to say?

By yourself or with your community group, work out what message you want to say.

Here are some prompting questions:

- Imagine you're at the local cafe, talking to a friend who doesn't know about your topic. What would you tell them in 20 seconds?
- Now you've got their attention, what are 3 supporting facts for your message?
- What kind of emotion do you want your message to evoke? Surprise? Anger? Outrage?
- If your message were a children's book, who would be the hero? The villain?
- Try writing the ideal headline for your article. What would it say?

Who is the audience?

Now, which media outlets would you like to promote your message? Make a list of them.

Then think briefly about the audience for each one, including:

- Location
- Age
- Level of education/affluence

Spend a few minutes browsing through the media outlet, or thinking about stories you have heard/read previously. Take note of what kind of language they use.

How does your message and the audience overlap?

This is the trick to getting media! Journalists and editors are looking for stories that will appeal to their readership. That's it.

If you want to get media, your job is to do the journalist's job for them.

So how can you make your message appeal to the audience of the local newspaper or radio station? What aspects of it will they be interested in?

Here's something to get you thinking. When journalists make decisions about which story to run, they are asking themselves five questions:

1. **How is this a new development?** E.g. a fresh conflict in a long-running argument.
2. **What's different, unusual or unique?** E.g. A dog biting a man isn't news, but a man biting a dog? That's news.
3. **Controversy or conflict?** Many stories have opposing sides for drama...but be careful of this for climate stories.

4. **Emotive/feel-good?** These are the ‘human interest’ stories, like a woman who has overcome cancer.
5. **Relevant to large numbers?** If it’s going to affect the reader’s lives, they’ll want to know about it.

Finally, with local newspapers, the best option is to make it local! For example, is there information on local climate change impacts? How many houses in your suburb have solar? Any local people doing good things for the environment? Highlight that.

In some case, simply putting the name of the local town or suburb in the headline can increase the chance of getting coverage.

Building relationships

The media works on relationships, even more so for local media.

Journalists keep ‘contact books’ – people they can call for a quick quote when a story breaks. Your ultimate goal is to become that ‘go-to’ person or group for your community.

So when making a decision about who to contact or how, follow these principles:

- The more personal the contact, the better. Rather sending an email to the general address it is better to email an individual journalist and say “I liked your last story, are you interested in writing about X?”
- Most people are more persuaded by face to face interaction, then phone calls, then writing. So pick up the phone and chat, when you can.

Don’t worry if your first pitch or media release doesn’t result in a published article. It still had an impact, because it put you on the journalist’s radar.

The main reason local groups don’t get local media is because they haven’t tried! Just keep letting the media know who you are and what you care about, and build up the relationship.

Contacting media

Ok, now here’s the nitty gritty of getting local media. You know what you want to say and you’ve tailored it to your audience.

Next step is sending it to them!

You can find contact addresses for many local newspapers at <http://www.newspapers.com.au/>

To read digital copies of Leader newspapers, visit <https://www.heraldsun.com.au/leader/digital-editions> (Scroll down and click on the front pages)

The editorial contact details will be listed on the top left of the inside front cover, like the example from a Leader newspaper on the right.

You can also work out individual journalist's email addresses by applying the company formula to their name.

For News Ltd, it's firstname.lastname@news.com.au So Greg Smith is greg.smith@news.com.au Easy!

Quotes and case studies

The most time-consuming part of a journalist's job is finding good case studies and quotes.

By case studies we mean people who represent the factual information. For example, if the story is about solar power, you need to interview a family that owns a solar panel system. It takes time and effort to track these people down.

What information is needed for a case study?

Usually:

- First name and last name
- Age
- Suburb
- One or two short quotes
- Mobile number and email for further interviewing

What makes a good quote?

Quotes shouldn't be used to convey factual information. They're mainly used to show reactions and display emotion.

For example:

*A new government policy reducing the solar feed-in tariff is angering local households **[this is factual information]**. "We're very upset about this **[emotion]** because we should be paid for the clean energy we produce **[impact]**," says Frankston solar panel owner Terry Smith **[suburb, name]**.*



Writing a media release

Now you know about quotes, it's time to have a go at writing a media release.

For local media, just imagine you are writing the story! You want them to be able to cut and paste it into the article.

Short, punchy sentences, a strong headline, good quotes are all important.

The inverted triangle method is a useful way to structure media releases (see below).

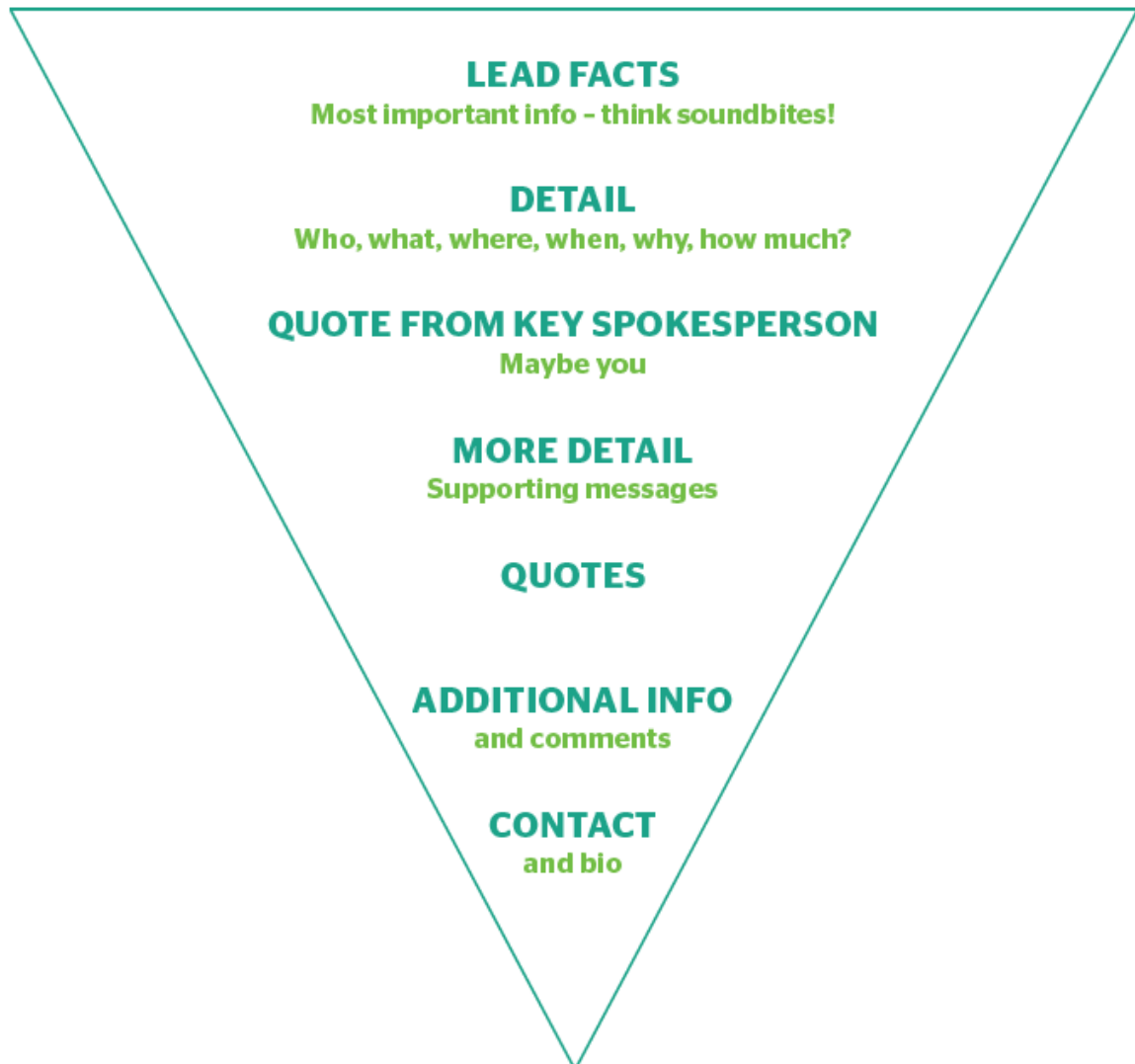
Always lead with the most important information right at the top, and include minor, background and less important info lower down.

Your media release should be A4 at most. Include a short case study if you can – news stories in print media often include a case study as a breakout.

Include your contact information (name, title, group name, mobile number, email, website).

If you have key spokespeople available for interview, include their names and contact details too.

Finally, don't worry about getting it perfect. Only you and the journalist will see it. It's better to get something out there quickly than to miss the story because you were too late.



Source: ACF Community action toolkit: media release guide

When to contact

In general, mornings are better. For Leader newspapers, the best time is often *just after* the publication has gone to print. If it comes out weekly on Tuesday, then try calling that Tuesday to get something in next week's paper.

How to contact

Journalists are busy people and you will probably need to get in touch using a few different channels.

If you don't have an existing relationship with the person, we recommend sending an email and then following up with a phone call the next morning.

If you do have a relationship, just call! Ask them informally if they're interested in your story. It can save a lot of time writing a media release.

Photo opportunities

Photos are a big selling point for local media. If you can think of a good photo idea, it'll really help to get a story published.

What makes a good local media photo? Again, your best guide is browsing through the paper, because it will be different for each audience/region.

However, a few things are always popular:

- Local community members doing something (often a group of people using a dynamic wide-angle lens)
- Kids
- Pets

Think of a photo that matches both the content and tone of your story. E.g. if the story is about the community being upset and angry, don't send a photo of people smiling! Fold your arms across your chest and look disappointed.

Choose a location that matches your story too. If it's about plastic pollution, a good photo would be picking up rubbish along the beach.

Interviews

The secret to doing a good interview is to stay on message.

Thankfully, this means you don't have to prepare as much! You just need to stick to the core messages you thought of at the beginning of this process.

Write down:

- One key message
- Two key examples or case studies
- Two facts or figures

If the interview veers into other territory, just steer it back with a bridging phrase. Instead of answering the journalist's question you can say something like, "Actually, what I care about is X." Move on to your preferred topic.

Before interviews, always...

- Take a breath before answering
- For radio, try to tell a story, creating an image in the listener's mind
- For TV, try to speak slower than usual, and don't fidget
- Treat everything as on the record
- Stick to what you know
- Don't be afraid to say no or correct errors
- Check to see if the journalist understands

Follow up

At the end of the interview, don't forget to ask the journalist what the publication date is so you can grab yourself a copy of the publication.

After the article comes out, email or ring the journalist to congratulate them. This is an excellent way to build a relationship.

Do share the story on social media if you can, tagging the journalist or paper. If the editor sees that climate change stories get a lot of traction online, they're more likely to keep covering the issue.

And finally...don't forget to congratulate yourselves! Of all the steps listed, the most important is simply having a go. Journalists are desperate for good stories, and they are waiting for you call.

Resources

1. Environment Victoria's story prep cheat sheet
2. Sample media release and story

See next page.

1. Environment Victoria's media story prep sheet

Your purpose:

What makes this news? (circle below):

- New and developing
- Different, unusual and unique
- Controversy or conflict
- Emotive/feel-good
- Relevant to large numbers

Target audience:

Why am I talking to them?

What message do you want to convince them of?

Why is it important to them?

Is there a story or analogy that can help me get my message across?

Media hit list:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

So what?!! cranky journo questions

Huh? What's the story again?

Yeah but how does it matter?

Who does it impact? Why should my listeners/readers care?

Got pictures? Something moving in the background?

I don't get it. What is the one thing you're adding others haven't already said?

2. Sample media release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 9 Sept 2019

Caulfield uncle and niece duo win state-wide clean energy billboard competition

Caulfield North local Ric Benjamin and his seven-year-old niece celebrated as his winning entry in Environment Victoria's clean energy billboard competition was unveiled at 558 Glen Huntly Road this week.

Mr Benjamin beat out 200 entries with a winning billboard highlighting childrens' vision for a clean energy future, including solar panels and wind turbines.

The billboard aims to draw the attention of local MP David Southwick, the Liberal Party Shadow Minister for Renewable Energy. Mr Southwick is under fire for his party's plan to scrap Victoria's Renewable Energy Target if elected in November.

"Inspired by my niece I had an idea that represents our clean energy future - by our children, for our children," said Mr Benjamin.

"Australia's energy revolution is unstoppable. Renewables are the cheapest, most efficient way to generate electricity.

"All Victorians want cheap clean power, and we want a future that our children can be proud of. We can achieve that through a government that is committed to investing in renewable energy."

"Even our youngest children want a clean and sustainable future," said Dr Nicholas Arberle, Campaigns Manager at Environment Victoria.

"Just like the billboard, when you ask young people to imagine the world they want to live in, they draw bright images of green cities with animals and birds. They want cities powered by the wind and sun, not big, dirty coal power stations.

"This election, Victorians must use their vote to help secure a renewable energy future for our children and for our state," said Mr Arberle.

Photo opportunity: Ric and kids in front of billboard at 558 Glen Huntly Road

For interview:

Caulfield local Ric Benjamin [mobile number]

Environment Victoria Campaigns Manager Nick Aberle [mobile number]



Asha, Riley and Matilda with the billboard designed by Ric Benjamin.

Billboard sparks clean energy debate

Caulfield North's Ric Benjamin was inspired by his seven-year-old niece when he entered Environment Victoria's clean energy billboard competition.

He beat 200 entries with a winning billboard which highlights children's vision for a clean energy future, including solar panels and wind turbines.

The billboard can be seen at 558

Glen Huntly Rd, Elsternwick.

Mr Benjamin said his creation aimed to ignite thoughts and discussions about how everyone could contribute to a clean energy future for "our children".

"Australia's energy revolution is unstoppable," he said.

"Renewables are the cheapest, most efficient way to generate electricity.

"All Victorians want cheap clean power, and we want a future that our children can be proud of."

Mr Benjamin also said he hoped the billboard would encourage children to start asking questions about the future.

"It is educating them — they should be learning about these things and thinking about how they can contribute," he said.

Above: the published article