

## WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

An effective communications plan is a critical part of the work to pass parity legislation and to advocate on behalf of people with limb loss and limb difference. In order to educate Americans and office holders about the need for legislation to protect access to prosthetic coverage, activists should work to take advantage of the various opportunities within each medium to communicate about our issues.

### SOURCES

#### Daily Newspapers

Key contacts at your daily newspaper include:

- **City/Metro Editors** assign stories of local and community interest.
- **National Editors** assign stories of national significance. Smaller papers often rely on wires for national news but may add comments from area leaders to give a story a local angle.
- **Political Reporters** cover political races and trends as well as legislative actions.
- **The Editorial Board** determines which editorials are written in the paper. You may want to contact an editor on the editorial board to ensure that they have all the information prior to editorializing about issues that affect people with limb loss and limb difference.
- **Op-Ed Editors** determine which op-eds will be used in the paper. You can contact this person in advance to discuss an op-ed topic that you wish to write about.
- **The Ombudsman** is responsible for mediating between readers and the management of the paper. He or she will often write a column in the paper to clarify or follow up on a disputed issue.
- **Photo Editors** assign photographers to cover events or activities.
- **Lifestyle Editors** assign human interest stories or special features.
- **Advertising Editors** cover advertising or the media, usually in the business section. This editor should be alerted to any paid media buys you may undertake.

#### Weekly Newspapers

Generally, most assignments are made by the paper's editor or publisher.

#### Wire Services

The daybook editor of local wires should be included on your press list.

#### Magazines

At smaller magazines, the editor-in-chief is your main contact; larger magazines will likely have a reporter assigned to cover specific topics such as health or legislation.

#### Television

In this case, the station's assignment editor or the reporter assigned to your specific issue may be contacted.

## Radio

The station's news director is the appropriate person to contact. In the case of regularly scheduled interview or talk-show programs, a producer or "booker" will be available.

## Internet

Many cities and newspapers have online bulletin boards where you can post information. There are also many popular Web sites, including "blogs." Look at ways to use the Web to its maximum potential.

## BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE MEDIA

There are many significant advantages to establishing close relationships with members of the media. By strengthening your contacts with the press, you can better control the way in which the issues are reported. You can also create a perception that you are the primary authority on issues of people with limb loss and parity efforts, which will keep the reporters calling you and in turn keep our issues and concerns in the news.

Building and maintaining good media relationships begins with creating a media list. Develop and maintain a comprehensive list of contact information for regional and local reporters who write about politics and health. It's also important to keep an eye on the national media for coverage of disability issues. Be sure to follow up with any reporters who have addressed our issues favorably, and consider submitting an op-ed or letter to the editor to counter unfavorable coverage.

Many papers or media outlets look for human interest stories. If you are (or have a patient who has been) affected by insurance restrictions, it's a good idea to use these personal stories to tell the larger story of the fight for parity legislation.

## DESIGNING AND DELIVERING YOUR MESSAGE

It's important to know your audience and to carefully craft your message, making targeted adjustments as circumstances require. Using facts and real-life examples help ensure that a message will resonate with your audience. Effective tools for delivering your message to the media include media advisories, press releases, op-eds, and letters to the editor.

## TYPES OF MEDIA

### Media Advisory

**Purpose:** To notify the media about your event and/or activities. The advisory should explain the "who, what, when, where and why" of the event and should provide just enough information to entice the media to attend. (**Note:** An advisory should **not** be confused with a press release; advisories are meant to persuade reporters to cover a story **before** it happens.)

**Use:** Send advisories to state/local media lists, which should include journalists who cover your issue or work on related topics. If you don't have a specific name, you can send it to the assignment editor or news director. Also send to the "daybook."

**Timing:** You should normally send advisories three to five days (no more than a week) in advance of an event.

**Format:**

- Print “For Planning Purposes” and Date of Release at the top
- Next, print “MEDIA ADVISORY”
- Brief headline describing the event
- Date, time and location should be highlighted
- Should be no longer than one page
- Provide contact information at the bottom of the page
- Indicate the end of the message by placing “-30-” or “###” at the bottom of the page.

**Press Release**

**Purpose:** To summarize and present your story, help the media to frame your message accurately and to provide them with background information and quotes from your spokesperson. Think of the press release as your chance to craft the message. Write a release that reflects the tone and includes the messages you would like to see in print.

**Use:** The press release should be the key component of any press kit or information packet. As with the advisory, releases should be targeted to specific reporters or the assignment editor or city editor for distribution to the appropriate reporter.

**Timing:** Distribute at your event. If reporters can’t make it to the event, be sure to get it to them in a timely manner, same day if possible – usually by email or fax.

**Format:**

- Printed on letterhead
- One-sided
- No longer than three to four pages
- Brief headline describing story
- Release date printed at top and contact information printed at bottom
- Indicate page continuation and identify end with “-30-” or “###.”

**NOTE:** An “EMBARGO” means a reporter can read the information, but cannot make it public until the date noted. The terminology is “HOLD FOR RELEASE – EMBARGOED UNTIL MONTH/DATE/YEAR AT TIME.” This is a tool used to send out press releases in advance of an event. This enables reporters to format their story ahead of time.

## Op-Ed

**Purpose:** Op-eds (opinion articles) are submitted to daily and weekly newspapers to express the author's position on a particular topic. (**NOTE:** Most papers have a review process for op eds that can take up to 10 days. Many papers require op-eds to be "exclusive," meaning the paper is the sole receiver of the article.)

**Use:** Submit an op-ed when the view you want to express has not been written about recently on the editorial page. These are good vehicles for explaining complicated issues.

An op-ed can be submitted with multiple authors. This is often done in the case where there are several groups working on an issue. It demonstrates the backing of each group and also provides a unified front.

In some cases, an organization or group may draft an op-ed on behalf of an elected official or community leader who is willing to submit the piece, but does not have the time to write it.

### Format:

- Title with authorship
- Approximately 400-800 words in length – check with the paper in advance for their specific requirements
- Be creative, but to the point
- Be focused – many op-eds are rejected because the author doesn't deliver a clear message
- Include a local angle and cite statistics or other data to spice up the issue
- At the end, include the author's title and organization, with a one-line description of the organization.

## Letter to the Editor

**Purpose:** To respond negatively or positively to an article or editorial that a newspaper, journal or magazine has printed on an issue important to you.

**Use:** Write letters that respond to news coverage that is erroneous or different from your position. But don't expect your letters to be printed every time.

### Format:

- The most important issue should be in the first paragraph. If your letter responds to an article or editorial printed in that paper, reference the title, date, and author of the original piece in the opening sentence.
- Your letter should be between 100-400 words. The shorter it is, the more likely it is to be printed. Check the rules for each paper.