



Affiliates Toolkit: Policy Communications

The purpose of this toolkit is to help all of UCP's affiliates develop strong media outreach operations through effective communication. This is meant to be a living document that will be updated and edited to reflect your needs—so please, let us know what you want to see included! We are happy to help explain or add to any of the content included.

UCP's policy team is a resource for you, getting you the information you need to be involved in policy and effective communicators. We can answer your policy questions, help develop a media outreach plan, and provide the content to ensure your efforts are successful.

Our policy team consists of Connie Garner, Executive Vice President of Policy; Kaelan Richards, Senior Director of Public Policy, Communications and Advocacy; Will Swenson, Director, Political Leadership and Strategy; Kate Josephson, Policy Associate; and Daryn Demeritt, Consultant. Together, we work to advance UCP's policy initiatives to help ensure fair and full citizenship for people with disabilities.

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We can be reached at anytime for questions about media relations or federal and state policies at:

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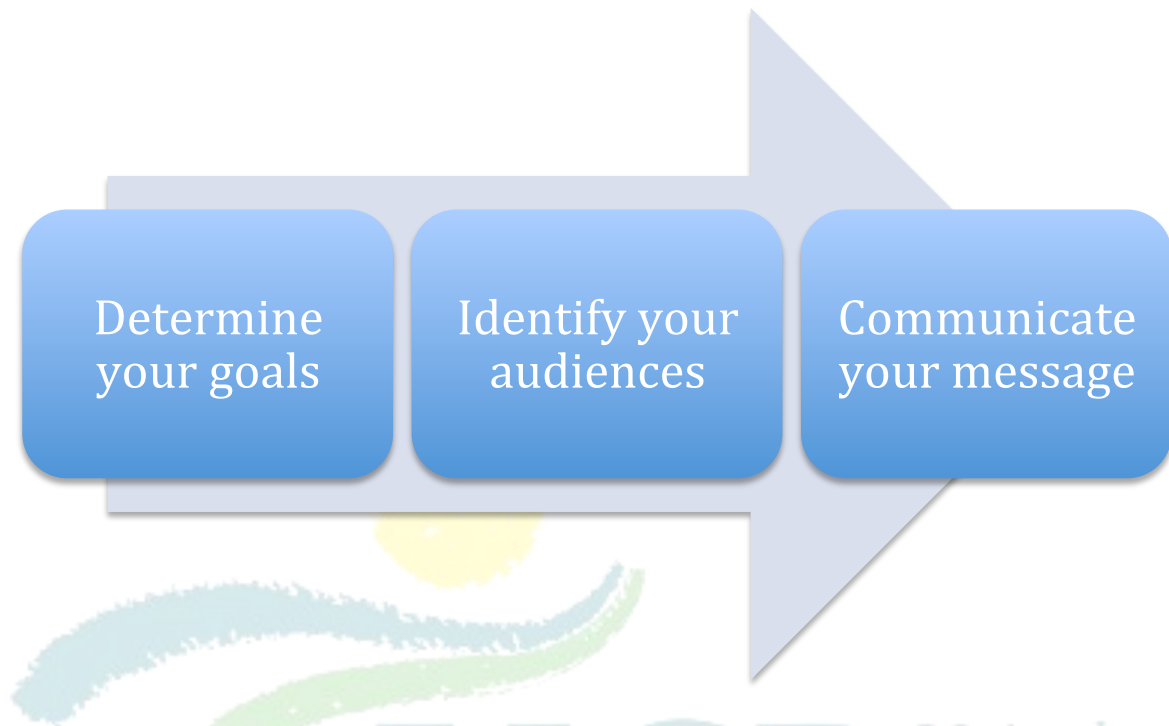
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How to develop and effectively convey your message:

There are three key areas in developing and conveying your message successfully. First, determine your goals. Then identify your audiences. Then the real work begins: communicating your message to achieve your goals.



First, determine your goals:

Is your ultimate goal to raise awareness about UCP or an issue? Or do you want to initiate a change in behavior? Once you determine what your goals are, both overall and for the short-term, you can start to develop the information you will need to communicate with press: talking points and background.

Talking points are simple, bulleted statements about why your topic or issue is important. They should be easy to understand and all contribute to making your ultimate point: why should someone care about this? Background should include more details and facts, but still focused on your goals and written in laymen's terms.

Second, identify your audiences:

You should understand and be familiar with your local media landscape. Make a list of the local newspapers, TV stations, radio stations and online news sources and find out what their angle is. Are they liberal, conservative? Do they have reporters dedicated to a single beat (topic) or are there only a few who cover them all? Keep in mind that in today's difficult economy, many traditional news sources, such as print media, are struggling. Your local paper may simply not have the resources to cover your issues, so be aware of the new media outlets, such as [Patch](#), and social media networks such as [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#) (social media will be discussed in detail later).

Keep in mind though that the media is NOT your ultimate audience. Your audiences are the people you want to reach; the media is merely the conduit for that information. So who do you want to reach? Individuals living with disabilities? Their families? Policymakers? Potential donors? Identify who you want to reach before developing your message.

Third, convey your message.

In order for your goals to be met, you need to convey your message in a simple and clear manner. Reporters are not always experts on the issues you are concerned about, so remember to explain what you mean, define medical terms, and avoid using too many acronyms. Utilize your talking points and background if needed, and repeat your main message.

Additionally, personal stories are a great way to illustrate your message and put a human face on an abstract topic (especially for policy or legislative issues). Reporters are always looking to add color, or personal details, to a story— try to offer information, or even put them in touch with someone who has a great personal story to tell. It may be helpful to develop a ‘story bank’ of specific, personal stories from local individuals that you can use as a resource when speaking to media (instead of trying to find someone who fits what they are writing about).

To accomplish these goals, we have included guidelines and suggestions for how to:

- Establish/ develop an effective communications plan
- Contact your local media
- Interact with members of the media
- Write a letter to the editor
- Write an op-ed
- Secure an editorial board meeting
- Write an effective press release
- Interact with your local/ state/ federal representatives
- Communicate in a crisis

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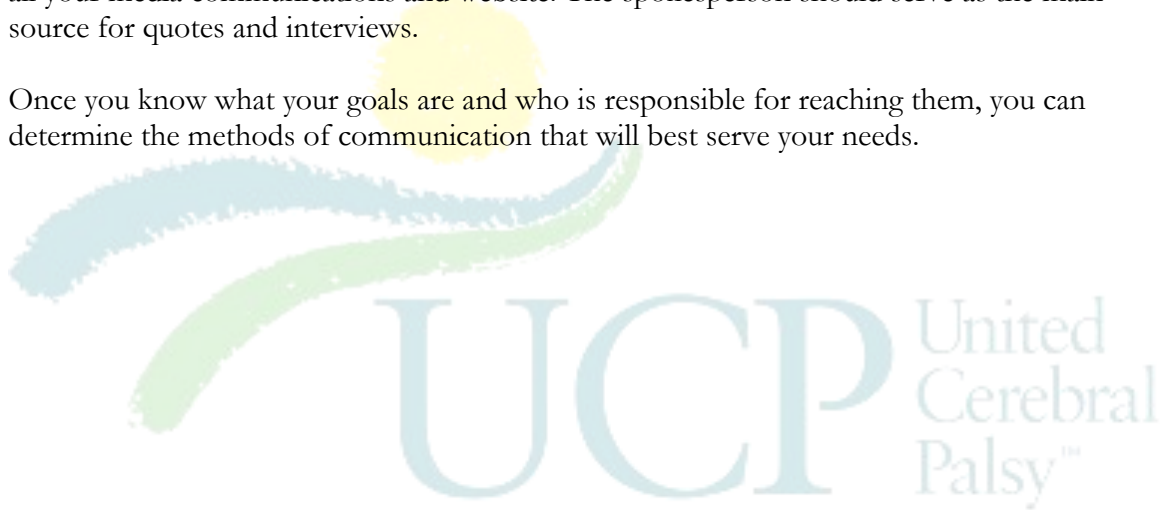
How to establish/ develop an effective communications plan:

The most important aspect of media outreach is to have a plan—what results do you want? Simply getting coverage in your local papers and TV stations should not be the goal. You should be working to convey a message to your audience, be it local, state or national media.

You also need to know what the current state of your media outreach is—none? Some? Lots of effort but not a lot of payoff? Knowing what your baseline is for your communications plan is critical to your setting goals and determining results. You should also be aware of what your logistical realities are: sometimes it is not realistic to expect one person to do everything you want to do, and your goals should reflect what is possible.

You should also identify who is the primary media contact person in your affiliate, as well as the primary spokesperson (this can be the same person, or several individuals). The primary media contact's purpose is outreach to the press, building and maintaining relationships with them, providing content, and communicating your message. They should be easily available to media and their contact information (direct line, cell phone and email) should be listed on all your media communications and website. The spokesperson should serve as the main source for quotes and interviews.

Once you know what your goals are and who is responsible for reaching them, you can determine the methods of communication that will best serve your needs.



Media tactics:

Traditionally, media outreach consisted of press releases, pitching calls and press conferences all focused on getting the media to pay attention to your story and hoping that they conveyed a favorable message to your audience. Each has a specific purpose and value to your communications plan.

- ***Press release:*** Useful for issuing information and quotes to a large audience. To write an effective press release, it needs to be timely, have a catchy headline, include focused content and quotes from members of your organization that summarize the press release's point. It should also include any 'boilerplate' information about your affiliate, the date and the contact information for your designated media contact.
- ***Pitching calls:*** You should develop a set of talking points for speaking to the media about your organization and the topic you are interested in 'pitching,' or talking about to media—they will help you stay on message and make your point quickly and effectively. To pitch a story, identify why a topic would make a good news story by asking yourself, 'why would someone care?' Answering that question will help you to identify the key facts. Use these to write your talking points. Then, identify the reporters who might be interested, and call them. Identify yourself and make your points quickly (reporters are busy people with tight deadlines) and make sure they have your contact information.

If they are interested, offer background information and interviews with your affiliates' spokespeople. Always remember to ask about their deadline (so you can be sure to get them information when they need it) and follow-up.

- ***Press conferences:*** Useful for big announcements or calling attention to a particularly interesting issue. They are most effective when they have a good 'hook' or local tie, and must be timely. You should plan for a press conference as you would any large event, ensuring that you have the space and time you need to make the event successful.

You should determine the content, the speakers and the format as soon as possible and start planning as early as you can. You should also send a media advisory with basic information (who, what, when, where, why) to the media at least three days before the event and follow up the day before to determine interest and confirm attendees. You should draft informative materials, including a press release with quotes, to be distributed at the event.

You should prepare remarks or talking points for your speakers, think about potential questions they might get, and ensure that all participants know their role. A 'run of show' document with the details on who is speaking and for how long can be very helpful in keeping everyone on the same page. This document should be distributed to all participants and a copy should be placed on the podium or table where the speakers will give their remarks.

Example: Run of Show document

TO: Interested parties
FROM: Kaelan Richards, UCP
RE: Run of show for press conference
DATE: June 6, 2012

Thank you for participating in tomorrow's press conference. Please arrive no later than 11:50am so we can begin on schedule at 12:00pm. John Doe will emcee the entire event, introduce speakers, and open up for questions.

All speakers will gather at the podium, which will have a microphone. All speakers will stand behind it, stepping forward to speak. Other participants will stand behind speakers.

The event is expected to run for 30 minutes. Thank you all for participating; it should be a great event!

Speakers (listed in speaking order):

John Doe
Jane Doe
Joe Smith

Run of Show:

John Doe: Makes opening remarks, introduces Jane Doe.

Jane Doe: Makes remarks.

John Doe: Thanks Jane Doe, introduces Joe Smith.

Joe Smith: Makes remarks.

John Doe: Thanks Joe Smith. Makes closing remarks. Opens event up for questions from the audience and media.

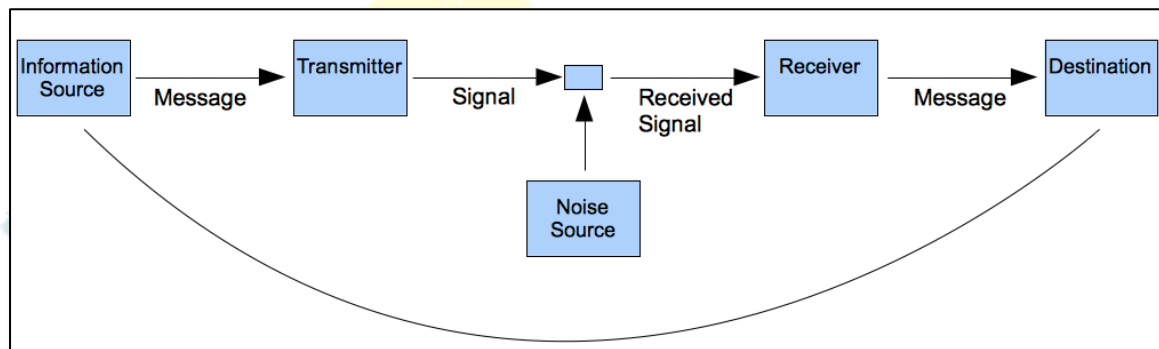
At the event, have the background materials and press release available (usually you can put them all out on a small table near the entrance to your press conference location). You may want to include a media sign in sheet to get an accurate count of which reporters where there (be sure to ask for their contact information in case you do not have it).

Be sure to connect with the media present, offer your assistance with whatever they need, and ensure they have the access they need to get their stories. After the event, you should follow-up to see if they need any additional information.

New/ social media:

While many of traditional media tactics are still valuable tools in conveying your message, social media has radically changed this traditional media landscape. With over 600 million people that access social media sites each day, this is an audience that cannot be ignored—but it is critical to determine whether your affiliate has the capability and resources to support a successful outcome on social media platforms. You should know what your limitations are, in terms of time commitments and creating content, before you initiate new or social media. In today's 24/7 news cycle, one of the worst things you can do is have content on a social media platform that is not updated frequently. These sites are driven by constantly uploaded content; it might be best to start with one platform and see how easy or difficult it is to manage before joining more.

According to Claude Shannon's theories about communication, this is how traditional communication works. In this model, you are the information source sending a message to a destination, your audience. Your message is carried through a transmitter, such as a press release, and passes through the noise of all the other news out there to be heard by the receiver, or reporters. The reporters' stories are then read by your audience, the destination.



Today, instead of formulating your message and relying on the media to understand and communicate it, you can bypass this process and reach your audiences directly. Through new media such as blogs and social networking platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube you can communicate directly with the people you want to reach, and even engage in a two-way conversation.

Social media's strengths are its application as a real-time communication network and its ability to foster a two-way conversation with your audience. By increasing and improving communication with your audience through social media, you can better understand what their needs are and how to meet them. Though many are still hesitant about utilizing new media, when approached correctly, its benefit outweighs the potential risks. A thorough, comprehensive communications plan should include a new media element.

To determine which social media platform is best for your goals, you should evaluate who your audience is and what message you want to convey. The three biggest and most popular platforms, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, each have their own strengths and audiences.

Social Media Networks:

Alicia Kubert Smith, UCP National's Social Media Director, is putting together a more in-depth guide to social networks and new media, but here is a primer on the three most popular sites: Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

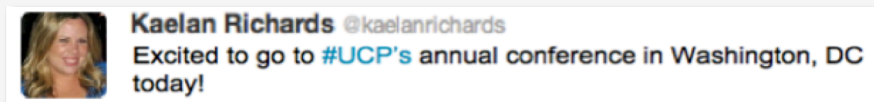
facebook

With more than a billion users worldwide, [Facebook](#) is the largest audience and the best home for diverse content (such as photos, videos, information, event invitations, and cross-posting of other social media). You can set up a Facebook page for your affiliate and post content, providing information and helping your audience understand what you do. Facebook users can then “like” your affiliate page, providing you with measurable progress.

twitter

[Twitter](#) is widely recognized as one of the fastest growing social networks, with hundreds of tweets being sent per second. By establishing and utilizing a Twitter account for your affiliate, you can reach a very wide audience and communicate with them in real-time—for instance, if someone has a question about a service your affiliate provides, they can tweet the question and you can answer it instantly. Both the question and the answer will be visible to all Twitter users, and by answering questions and tweeting information about your affiliate, you can build up a knowledge base for others to view.

Additionally, through the use of hashtags, you can identify a tweet as related to an issue. For example, if you were to tweet about UCP's annual conference, you could type:



By adding the hashtag #UCP, this tweet will be associated with all other tweets that include it, creating searchable content and increasing your tweet's visibility.

You Tube

[YouTube](#) is the best social media-sharing platform for videos, enabling you to upload and share any video you create. Additionally, you can create a channel for your affiliate, which is a single page on which all the videos you upload would be featured. This enables you to highlight videos of your choosing, as well as preventing individuals looking for your videos from having to search for each one—they are all accessible on your channel.

How to contact your local media:

The easiest way to contact your local media is to call the newsroom of each newspaper or TV station you are interested in and ask which reporters cover the issues you are interested in. Some media outlets will even have this information posted on their websites. You should try to find their phone numbers (office and cell), what topics they cover, and email address, and create a list (a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet is usually best) of this information.

Here is an example of how a media list could look in Excel:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	Last Name	First Name	Publication	Beat	Office Phone	Cell Phone	Email Address
2	Smith	Joe	Standard Times	Health care	(202) 555-5555	(202) 999-9999	joe.smith@standard-times.com
3	Smith	Jane	Gazette	Health and education	(202) 555-5555	(202) 999-9999	jane.smith@gazette.com
4	Doe	John	Herald	Employment/ labor	(202) 555-5555	(202) 999-9999	jdoo@herald.com
5	Doe	Jane	Tribune	Education	(202) 555-5555	(202) 999-9999	janed@tribune.com

Once you have created a list, call through it and introduce yourself to each reporter. You could even invite them to get coffee, which will allow you meet the reporter in person and gauge their interest in your issues. A little personal interaction goes a long way with reporters that are pitched stories all day—and they will appreciate your effort.

One of the strongest connections with reporters you can have is to establish yourself as the expert on a particular issue, and to be available to that reporter when that issue is in the news. Use the knowledge you have on issues such as disability policy, Medicaid and providing services to your advantage—very few other people have such a unique perspective on how state and federal policies impact people’s everyday lives. Reporters will appreciate this, and know that they can call you for a reaction to news on these issues. In addition, if there are personal stories that could highlight the impact of policy changes, you should think about sharing these with a reporter, as this insight can help to explain a complicated policy. Be aware though, that NO personal details should be shared without the consent of the individual.

Additionally, the UCP national office can help you to put together local media lists. Just let us know what you need assistance with and we can provide you with a detailed contact list for your local reporters.

How to interact with members of the media:

When speaking with reporters, you should adhere to the generally accepted ‘language’ of the media concerning on and off the record.

- **“On the record”** means anything you say can be quoted and attributed to you.
- **“On background”** generally means that you are providing information that the reporter can use, but they may not quote you OR attribute it to you (you must be clear which, or both, as some reporters define this differently).
- **“Off the record”** is supposed to be information that the reporter CANNOT use, but you want them to know. However, nothing is ever totally off the record, so be careful.

If you simply call a reporter and start talking, anything you say is on the record UNLESS you specifically specify otherwise. You will need to establish the terms on which you are speaking at the beginning of any conversation to avoid confusion.

When communicating with members of the media, you should try to be as helpful as possible. If you are relying on traditional media, they are the gatekeepers of the information you want to get to your audience. Stay on your message, provide all the background information they need, and respond quickly to any questions they might have.

Most importantly, your communications plan should be a two-way conversation with the media and your intended audience. Simply pushing information out without a plan and without any follow-up will not accomplish your goals. You should identify your message, decide which methods of communication you want to use, communicate your information in a timely way, and respond to inquiries quickly.

Reporters are almost always “on deadline,” meaning they need to turn in their stories at a certain time that day, usually around 4:00 or 5:00pm. When speaking to a reporter, find out what their deadline is so you can plan accordingly. If you fail to respond or get the reporter information by this time, any work you did to help them will be useless—so be sure to know about and respect their deadlines. A key part of this is always being available to reporters, so make sure that your contact information (including your cell phone and email address) is listed on your website and voicemail.

How to write a letter to the editor:

Letters to the editor can be very useful tools in getting your message out to a large population. They are usually in response to the newspaper's coverage (in editorials or stories) on a particular issue, but can be about other issues as well. The best letters to the editor are short (200 words or less), clearly written and express a strong point of view. It is best to focus on one topic and try to make as strong a case for your opinion as possible. An example would be:

June 8, 2012

To the Editor:

I write to express my strong support for the Affordable Care Act, which the Supreme Court of the United States is currently deliberating. This health care law has made a dramatic difference in the lives of so many Americans, including people living with disabilities. Insurance companies can no longer deny coverage to children due to a pre-existing condition or impose lifetime caps on coverage, and in 2014, the law will expand Medicaid coverage to help more people living with disabilities get access to the care they need.

As a provider of these services through United Cerebral Palsy, I see how great the need is for this care, and how the Affordable Care Act is starting to make a real difference for those in need. I urge the Supreme Court Justices and every American to support this critical law, and look forward to it continuing to change our lives for the better.

Sincerely,

Kaelan Richards
Washington, D.C.

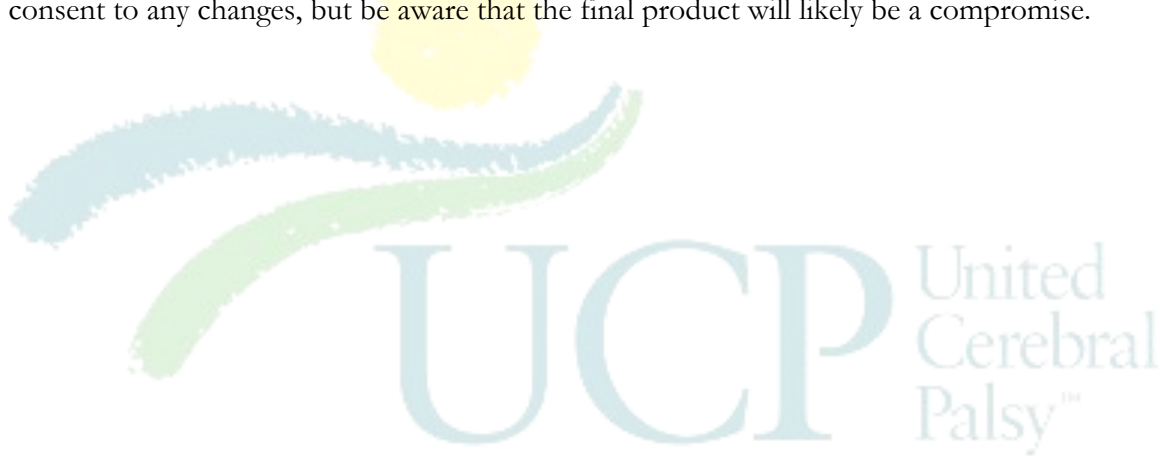
To submit your letter to the editor, call the paper and ask who to send it to. Most newspapers will have a general address or email address for you to send it to. If you want to make a bigger statement than just one letter, you can get others to write in about the same topic—newspapers will often run multiple letters to the editor, and different perspectives focused on the same topic can be very powerful.

How to write an effective op-ed:

Think of an op-ed as a longer letter to the editor, around 500 words (though newspapers vary on their required length; be sure to check with the paper you want to send it to) and including more details supporting your point of view.

The name, “op-ed” is a shortened version of “opinion editorial,” and describes how it should fit in the newspaper’s editorial section. Typically, an op-ed’s view aligns with the newspaper’s own editorial style—for example, the Wall Street Journal, a more conservative paper, is much more likely to run op-eds from conservative perspectives rather than more liberal views.

When writing an op-ed, you should pick a topic that you feel very strongly about and make your case not only with your opinions, but also with supporting facts. Including a personal story, whether your own or someone else’s, can add personalize the op-ed and make it stand out. Again, much like the letter to the editor, you should try to make your op-ed as strong as possible—but be aware that newspapers can ask you to edit it, or suggest how it could be improved. This is standard practice and done for a variety of reasons, from the editorial board’s views to simple formatting or space issues. A newspaper should always ask for your consent to any changes, but be aware that the final product will likely be a compromise.



How to secure an editorial board meeting:

An editorial board meeting is simply a meeting and discussion with the members of a newspaper's editorial board staff. These are the people who make the decisions about what gets published each day and what the newspaper's opinion on a topic will be—they determine content and write the editorials. Meeting with these individuals can be a critical part of your media outreach and help to establish a relationship with the most influential people at the newspaper.

For such a meeting, you need to have a strong position on a topic—for many affiliates, this could be the importance of Medicaid funding for people living with disabilities. Your affiliate's Executive Director is likely the best person to participate in an editorial board meeting, and they should focus on explaining what they do, what UCP's goals are, and why both of these things matter: is there a budget debate going on in your state? Is the governor trying to close institutions? Additionally, is there a particularly moving story from someone you serve that would help to illustrate your points?

To secure an editorial board meeting, call the newspaper you are interested in meeting with and ask if they have an editorial calendar (some boards only discuss certain topics at pre-determined times during the year). If yes, ask for a copy of it and determine when it would be best for you to try and arrange a meeting. If not, simply ask if setting up an editorial board meeting would be possible to discuss UCP's work and whatever topic you are interested in discussing.

Once you have secured the meeting, come prepared—your Executive Director should be clear and concise, offer their perspective and bring background materials. Most newspapers have several members of the editorial board, so ask with whom you will be meeting. Be respectful of their time, particularly during election seasons, as they will be busy meeting with local candidates.

How to write an effective press release:

The most important aspect of an effective press release is clarity—you must clearly and concisely explain the topic, any necessary background information, and include relevant quotes that support the overall release's goals.

There are also several formatting items that should be included, such as the location of its origin (for example, Washington, D.C.) should be at the beginning of the introductory paragraph, followed by the date. The headline should be bolded, and if you include a second subheadline, that should be italicized. Additionally, to note the end of the press release, it is standard practice to include three hash marks at the very bottom.

There are several elements that a standard press release should include:



A 'newsy' headline—you want a statement that will grab the attention of a reporter. Make it succinct, to the point, and as interesting as you can. Remember that if you are emailing the release that many people will read it on the mobile phones and will only see the first few words, so make them count.



A strong introduction: the first paragraph should spell out exactly what the news is and include any important details. Give logistical details if relevant, such as where an event took place and who attended.



A paragraph with details about what you are announcing. The first paragraph should introduce the issues being covered in the release, but it is critical to include details for reporters who want to know more.



A quote from your affiliate's spokesperson (Executive Director or other media contact) that supports the main point of the press release and adds a personal perspective to the document.



It is critical that the entire release looks professional, sounds authoritative, and is free of spelling and grammatical errors.

Additionally, this is a great (and amusing) example of how to write a press release from Mitch Delaplane of PitchPoint Public Relations. While it does not actually convey any news, Delaplane's document includes all the necessary components of an effective press release.

The Most Amazing Press Release Ever Written

PR Professional Distributes Groundbreaking Press Release

CHICAGO, Jan. 11, 2011 /PRNewswire/ -- Mitch Delaplane of PitchPoint Public Relations has issued the most amazing press release ever written. While hundreds of press releases are distributed daily, Delaplane feels this particular release will go down in history as the most amazing press release that has ever been written.

"I've been in the business for over ten years and have to say, I'm speechless," claims Delaplane. "The title alone grabs you and demands that it be read. Then there's this quote that completely takes things to an entirely new level. I'm proud of this press release. In fact, I think it is [really] amazing."

Typically reserved for company news announcements and other public relations communications, the press release has long been the favored default for informing media about exciting, groundbreaking news. Then this news release comes along and changes everything people thought they knew about press releases.

"I'm quoting myself again because the first quote didn't do it justice," says Delaplane. "If you're still reading this news release, then you know what I'm talking about when I say it's something special. In fact, it's 483 words of pure awesomeness. When it crosses the wires, I believe history will have been made."

The science behind this Earth-shattering news release lies in its simplicity – no science, just pure old press release craftsmanship. It started with an incredible brainstorming session that asked a very simple question: "what makes a press release amazing?" Elaborate notes from that brainstorm were then formulated into mesmerizing sentences, paragraphs and pages...all expertly designed to make you pause and reflect at the brilliance of this press release.

Every single word of this news release was track changed, stetted, then track changed again to its original draft. Upon final approval, it was spell checked, fact checked and printed for posterity. The result is a two-page, 1.5-spaced news release that is like no other news release in existence.

According to PitchPoint Public Relations you have just read the most amazing press release ever written. If you agree, tell Mitch at mitch@pitchpointpr.com or follow him on Twitter at [Lifeisamitch](#).

If you disagree, issue your own press release and prepare for war.

###

About PitchPoint Public Relations

PitchPoint Public Relations is a very small public relations company located in Chicago, IL. It currently consists of Mitch Delaplane, an Apple computer and his bloodhound Sally (no overhead, just great PR). Mitch has been doing public relations since 1999 and has worked for some of the largest public relations agencies in Chicago and many of their Fortune 500 clients/brands. While he can do every single facet of public relations, his background is in consumer and sports marketing. His main interests are helping companies develop creative programs and alternatives to traditional public relations tactics.

How to interact with your local/ state/ federal representatives:

Your local, state and federal representatives are an enormous resource that you should be taking advantage of—and you are an important resource to them. They have a wealth of information, play a pivotal role in the legislative process, and provide the access to policymakers themselves. You can offer them your knowledge of how policies work at a personal level and can help put a human face on abstract legislative policies. It is in your interest, as well as theirs, to establish a strong relationship.

Contacting the offices:

Local:

To determine who your local representatives are, simply [search online](#) for your city's name and the word government. Most cities maintain their own webpages with information on who your representatives are and will guide you to their individual websites, which should include contact information. Also, look for your local mayor or town manager's offices.

State:

To find out who your state representatives are, [select your state](#) and follow the directions on each individual website. Typically, you will need to enter your zip code and/ or street address (as many districts are split across zip codes to determine who your state representatives are. You should find at least one member of the state's House of Representatives and one member of the state's Senate representing your area. You can also use these links to find out who your state's governor is and how to contact their office.

Federal:

At the federal level, you will have one member of the [U.S. House of Representatives](#) and two members of the [U.S. Senate](#) representing your area and state. Simply enter your zip code on the House site, or scroll down to your state on the Senate side.

Who to talk to:

Once you have determined who represents you, simply call up the office and ask to speak to whoever handles disability issues. For smaller offices, this person will likely have many responsibilities, and might be the Legislative Director, or the elected official themselves. For larger federal offices, there will likely be two people with this responsibility: a caseworker and a policy staffer. Typically, the caseworker will be in the local office and the policy staffer will be located in the Washington, D.C. office; both of these individuals can be useful to you.

In the local offices, the caseworkers are experts on government agencies and are often able to cut through bureaucratic red tape to get results. In the D.C. offices, the policy staff will be much busier (as they work directly with Members of Congress), but more knowledgeable about current policies and pending legislation.

What to do:

You should start with the local office; introduce yourself to the caseworker and offer your knowledge on disability policies issues. These staffers are not always experts on every issue,

so they should appreciate your insight. Positioning yourself as a resource, someone that the office can call if they have questions about policies or other issues, can help to increase the influence you have on these decisions.

Federal offices organize many events when the Member is home from D.C., typically during recesses for the [U.S. House of Representatives](#) and [U.S. Senate](#). If they support a topic you care about, such as preventing cuts to Medicaid, you could suggest the Member tour your facility or offer to host a press conference on the topic. They are always looking for events ideas, and this could help you to establish a strong working relationship with their office.

You can also request a meeting with the elected official or Member, although you should bear in mind that they have busy schedules and you may meet with staffers instead—and that's not necessarily a negative outcome. Staffers write memos, brief their bosses, and write legislation; they are key individuals to know. Be respectful of their time, make your points clearly and succinctly, and provide any information they may need.



Communicating in a crisis:

At some point, all communications professionals will deal with a crisis. Some will be small, some will be big—but the outcome of them all depends on how you respond, and if you can take control of the situation. The key to doing so is having a plan, acting quickly, and communicating information to the media in a timely manner.

Here are a few tips for communicating in a crisis situation:

1. Plan ahead:

Think about problems that are likely to come up and decide how you will respond. You should determine who will serve as the primary contact for media, and ensure that their contact information is easily available to media (posted on the website, listed on your voicemail, etc). Work to develop relationships with reporters so that if a crisis occurs, you will already know who to reach out to and how to work with them (and hopefully some goodwill).

2. Understand your role in the story:

Are you the target? Are you the villain? Do you need to set the story straight, or defend yourself? Knowing what part you need to play is critical to determining how to respond.

3. Be in control of the story, quickly:

The sooner you act, the better. Get the facts and relevant information out to the media as fast as you can. If you do not have all the information yet, tell the press that you are working on it and will report back as soon as possible—and then DO it. Following up with the facts is crucial. You don't want reporters upset that they could not get the information from you/ having to rely on third party information. Additionally, not commenting looks like an admission of guilt, so you need to get a statement out as soon as possible.

4. Don't hide or lie:

You must be a credible source for the truth, or reporters will not trust you. Do not talk or speculate until you have all the facts you need. Do not retreat into a bunker and hope the story will just go away— with the 24/7 news cycle and access to Twitter and other forms of instant communication, it is very difficult to hide. Find out what is being said about the crisis, engage your allies and work to build outside validators. Get any information you have out to the press in a timely manner.

5. Remember, sometimes the story is the story:

Don't hate the media for reporting a story; they are just doing their job. You should certainly argue your side of the story, but try not to damage your relationships with reporters—it's usually not worth burning bridges. The story will eventually end, and as public relations guru Howard Rubenstein says, "The public's institutional memory is very short, absent criminal or moral transgressions. [They] are ready to forgive."