

Tips for Working with Local Media

Developing and maintaining effective communication with local media is an extremely important element of conservation districts' outreach efforts. Media outlets provide venues for new topics to be presented and important issues to be discussed. They can also serve as an effective recruiting tool. Establishing long-lasting relationships with media is an ongoing process. Below are several tips that will assist conservation district employees and officials hone their messages and build and maintain positive relationships with local media outlets.

Tips for effective relationships with the media:

- Develop a media list that includes your community's print, radio, TV and online outlets. Create a database with contact information.
- Create a complete press kit in which you introduce yourself, your district staff and the district's mission statement, goals and objectives. Include contact information for you and your district officials.
- Find out which editors, producers or writers are especially interested in your district's activities and send them a press kit. Follow up with a phone call, and try to set up a face-to-face meeting.
- Send press releases or public service announcements (PSAs) regularly. Time PSA campaigns for when the outlet isn't sold out with paid advertising, i.e. during elections. You will be more likely to get on the air when people are viewing or listening.
- Pitch new story ideas, including personal interest stories. Call a local reporter or broadcaster and suggest a story line that is unique regarding one of your projects or landowners. This can develop into a longer story and more coverage.
- Never assume the person you are working with knows everything...or nothing. Avoid using acronyms or technical lingo until you can sense his or her knowledge of the issue or programs.
- Invite the media to a field day so they can see your district's work first-hand. For example, if your group educates the public on agricultural issues, invite local students to tour a landowner's farm and ask the media to come along.
- Invite members from the media to meet with your board of directors. Don't leave out any medium; invite TV, radio, web and print reporters, editors and producers.
- When a member of the media covers your district's issues, send them a simple note acknowledging the story. If something wasn't quite right in the story, call them and have a friendly discussion to clarify the issue for future stories.
- Relax. Working with members of the media does not need to be stressful and should not be feared. Simply tell your story and remain respectful; it will pay off!

Tips for honing your message:

1. Make your message timely and newsworthy. Sometimes saying less is actually more. Often reporters are on strict deadlines and are unable to read through lengthy pages of technical material. Simplifying and summarizing important information makes their job easier and ensures that you will have more control over the intended message.
2. Provide a provocative idea on any subject. The first priority of many media outlet companies is to increase readership. Issues that are provocative, interesting, and controversial often garner more attention, thus satisfying the media outlet's need as well as your own.
3. Be ready to speak on current issues. There are a number of extremely important issues that present themselves every day. Being prepared to communicate in a timely manner is almost as important as the response that you decide to give. Conducting regular research on important issues and staying up to date with new developments will pay off in the long run.

