

Techniques for Enlisting Local Media In the Planning Process

An important part of telling the planning story is providing information to your local media. Here are some tips for connecting with your local media, excerpted from American Planning Association (APA) information at www.planning.org.

- Define your message first
Given a chance to have the media run just one sentence from you what would it be? Your message should be focused, timely, and relevant and you must stick to it.
- Think locally, pitch wisely
Reporters are always looking for the local angle. So, package your message or information in the context of a local story.
- Try different tactics
Press releases are only one of many useful ways to pitch journalists. Be creative in your attempts to reach the public. Your message may be framed just as well within op-ed articles, letters to the editor, video news releases, public service announcements, print advertisements, flyer campaigns, press conferences, and staged events.
- Provide extras
Journalists love it when you make it easy for them to enhance a story. The less research that they have to complete on their own time, the more likely it is that they will use your material as the basis for their piece. You can assist print journalists by providing accompaniments such as maps, photos, fact sheets, handy lists or rankings of relevance, contact and biographical information for "experts," and useful website addresses.
- Play by the rules
Press releases should include only the most basic details (who, what, where, when, why and how.) Keep letters to the editor short and sweet. Return media calls promptly. Never attack a journalist — if you need to disagree, do it firmly and with professional conviction, but avoid rudeness under any circumstance.

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- Talk F-A-S-T
Remember these tips for crafting an effective and compelling message for the media:

F is for framing. The frame is the big-picture rationale for why people should listen. A good frame drives home the overall importance and value of your message.

A is for analogies. Analogies do two things: allow the listener/reader to explore an idea with more familiar concepts; force the listener/reader to actively engage your idea.

S is for sound bite. Incorporate a few short, pithy, memorable phrases. These prompt recall of your message and make good copy for a journalist looking to capture a complex message in a compact, engaging manner.

T is for tale. It all comes back to simple storytelling. Stories make a lasting impression and humanize your message. Stories are also useful ways to relate a complex idea to the local context.

OTHER ALTERNATIVES FOR GETTING THE WORD OUT

If using the local news media is uncooperative or otherwise not an option for you, consider some of the following methods, depending on your budget and resource availability:

- If the newspaper is the main option for informing the public, consider a **display advertisement**. Use techniques such as a border around text, designed to set the advertisement off from articles and formal legal notices.
- Many local governments in Georgia have their own **website** providing directory information for department contacts, meeting agendas and minutes, listings of special events, and more. Recognizing that the Internet has become a popular way to provide information to the public, consider dedicating a **special section** of the local government website to the planning process.

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- **Newsletters** of community groups and neighborhood associations are a great way to target information of interest in a particular geographic area or to specific interest groups. One word of caution is to respect very early deadlines for printing of newsletters, which can be as much as a month earlier than the date of distribution.
- **Announcement flyers** could be printed and then posted – with permission – in high traffic areas such as libraries, shopping areas, schools, and colleges.
- Most city halls and county courthouses feature a lobby area, central gathering area, or reception area. One way to put this space to good use is to set up a **display** of photographs, maps, and planning features for all visitors to the building to visit. That way, when a citizen comes to renew a drivers' license, pay a permit fee, or seek information, there is an opportunity to learn about the planning process.
- Use the **cable television** government or local access channel. This may involve significant video production costs, but once developed, the program can be repeated at different times and on different days. Many cable companies will run public service announcements.
- Consider creating a dedicated **telephone line** with a recorded message and a menu of options for citizens to record their own messages about planning issues.
- **School teachers and students** represent a great resource for generating interest in the community and the how the planning process works. One benefit to introducing students to planning is that they carry the message home to their parents, thus getting them interested as well.
- An effective strategy is to take the message to the public through presentations at meetings and civic events. A **speaker's bureau** comprised of the planning team – government staff, consultants, and volunteers – offers introductory presentations on the planning process to civic clubs, business groups, neighborhood associations, and schools.

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- Whichever forms of public notification are selected for a particular community, remember to always **include a contact person with a phone number and e-mail address** on the notice. The reader of the notice may have questions, desire more information, or may simply want to speak with someone about the planning process.

POWERPOINT PRESENTATION

You may download an easy-to-use PowerPoint presentation, [Planning Our Future](#). These slides provide talking points for your use in making presentations to civic groups, homeowners groups, or others who want to hear about local planning and quality growth. You can add slides to give more specifics about your community or simply use this program as is. Be sure to modify the last slide to include the appropriate contact information for your own community and region.

For more information about involving the public in general in the planning process, please see [DCA's State Planning Recommendations: Community Participation Techniques](#).