

GREAT PLAINS FOOD BANK PARTNER AGENCY “TIP SHEET”

How to engage with the media

Your local media is a powerful and extremely effective tool to help you communicate the need and great work being done by your non-



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profit. Each region of the country receives news from a specific media market and each media entity is fully aware of the scope of their coverage. Whether it be your local weekly newspaper, TV or radio stations, each entity may be more willing than you think to share the news on all you do.

You just need to ask.

Steps to take to gain media coverage

1. Identify the event or topic you wish to gain media coverage for and identify the proper timeline – Ask yourself, “when do I want the story to appear in the news and when should I approach the media about it?”
2. Put together a plan to include the following:
 - a. What time and place do I want the media to show up? (be as flexible as you can)
 - b. Identify a person(s) that is willing to be a spokesperson to speak on camera or handle interviews and prepare them with all the information they will need.
 - c. Identify the best person at the media entity to cover the story and reach out to them directly. Phone calls always work best.
 - d. Be as flexible and accommodating as you can with their schedule.
 - e. When the media arrives, be certain they have everything they need to cover your story well.
 - f. Be sure to thank them for their coverage and communicate to them the critical importance of media coverage to providing this service to feed those in need.
 - g. Enjoy seeing yourself on TV or in the newspaper!

What to keep in mind:

- ALWAYS show your organization and your relationship with the Great Plains Food Bank in a positive light.
- Think about who the TV, radio and print news outlets are in your community. This is who you need to be targeting.
- If possible, maintain positive relationships with reporters who have covered your work in the past. When opportunities for coverage arise, reach out to them

directly for coverage. This will be a much more effective route than sending your news story to a general news email address.

- When reporters do show up to cover your story, kill them with kindness and make their job as easy as you possibly can for them. **They will need someone to interview and if you can have that person in mind and have them prepared, this is a huge help for them!**
- If you are in a smaller community with a weekly newspaper, oftentimes their print deadline is well ahead of when the paper is published. Keep this in mind when you are wanting to get timely information included.
- The media may be interested in more things as a story than you realize. Possible news stories to consider engaging the media with:
 - A large or unique food donation you receive.
 - Your shelves are running low or when you are in need of a certain food item.
 - Long-serving volunteers or a large group of students or a church group that have come in to help. The media loves human-interest stories.
 - If you have a distribution coming up where you either need volunteers or wish to get the word out, let them know ahead of time.
 - If there is someone you serve with a specifically compelling story and if your food pantry helped them get back on their feet that is willing to share, the media love these stories.

“Crisis” communication tips

Nobody wants to think about a situation that might paint your organization in a negative light, but it is wise to be prepared in the event this ends up happening. Perhaps you are the victim of negative press or an unfavorable social media presence is happening. If appropriate, you wish to respond in a favorable manner that tells your side of the story. In most cases where a negative event does occur, you will be monitoring media outlets with a prepared response that eventually will not be needed. It is better to be safe than sorry!

In its most simple form, being prepared to deal with negative press is about three things:

1. Being as honest and transparent as possible (never lie and never guess!).
2. Only telling as much information that you need to (you likely want the issue to receive as little attention as possible).
3. Bring the discussion back to your mission of the critical importance of providing food assistance to those in need.

If you are faced with a “crisis” communication situation, feel free to reach out Great Plains Food Bank Communications Manager Jared Slinde (jslinde@greatplainsfoodbank.org | 701.476.9107) for assistance.