

CHAPTER SEVEN: VISIBILITY THROUGH COMMUNITY AND MEDIA OUTREACH

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Identifying Reporters

Media lists

Developing a current, accurate media list is the first key to gaining media coverage. Make a list of the reporters, editors, and departments in your state's newspapers and broadcast stations that focus on AAUW priority issues and are likely to use AAUW's news. Include contact names, phone and fax numbers and, if available, e-mail addresses for all the media outlets in your area or state. The information below will help you get started.

Identifying Print Reporters



- **Familiarize yourself with local outlets and papers –**

Review daily papers, prominent weekly outlets, and appropriate community papers. Take the time to locate reporters' or editors' bylines on articles and editorials that deal with women's issues.

- **Use media directories.** The Two-Minute Activist page on the AAUW website includes a media directory that contains contact information for national and local media across the country. In addition, several companies publish media directories with details about every outlet in your city, county, and state (print and broadcast). You can find directories at bookstores, libraries, college communications departments, and the AAUW media relations department.
- **Make calls.** Call each newspaper on your list and ask for the name, phone, and fax numbers of reporters responsible for covering women's issues, family issues, and education. Also obtain the information for the political reporter, editorial page editor, metro or city editor, and the photo editor.
- **Keep your list current.** Turnover can be high in the news business, and reporters covering the issues on your list may change frequently. Make calls quarterly to review and update your media list.

Getting Results from Reporters

Just as reporters are often the most direct routes to reaching the public, the telephone is your most direct route to reaching reporters. Initiating and responding to calls from the media is one of the most critical tasks in getting AAUW's issues and events covered.

Assume reporters are already busy when you call them. Open the call with, "Are you on a deadline?" If the answer is yes, ask for a good time to call back. If no, assume that you have only 60-90 seconds to "pitch" your issue or event.

Timing is everything. Mid or late afternoon calls are less likely to be returned because of deadline pressure. Morning or early evening calls allow for more leisurely conversations because these are "down times" for reporters.

Be organized before you initiate or take a call from the media. Have appropriate background materials, data, and other contact names and numbers available at your fingertips. Have an event explanation ready as well.

Offer to fax or send follow-up information. Be prepared to re-send press releases or advisories as a reminder.

Always call a reporter back as soon as possible. If you have 20 phone messages, call the reporter back first to ensure the best possible chance of obtaining media coverage.

Identifying Reporters at Television Stations



When making your list of television stations, be sure to include not only network stations, but also local cable and independent stations with news programs. Although a station's anchors are on each day, the people behind the scenes decide what should be covered, and who will report on the story.

Contact each station on your list and ask for the following:

- **News director and assignment editor.** They determine the value of an incoming news idea, and if it is worthy, make an assignment to have an issue or event covered.
- **Reporters.** As with newspapers, the reporters who cover politics as well as women's, education, and family issues will want to know what you are planning.
- **Producers for relevant programs.** Many stations feature a "working women's" program or public affairs talk show. The producers for these programs decide what and whom the programs will cover.

Identifying Reporters at Radio Stations



Radio stations offer some of the best opportunities for coverage, so be sure to include AM and FM stations that feature local news programming in your media list. Radio stations in larger markets offer two good mechanisms for coverage: news, especially during commuter "drive time," and talk shows. For each larger radio station, identify the news director, reporters, and producers. Call the stations early in the morning. Avoid calling them on the hour or half-hour since they are often doing live news shows then.

Knowing whom to call is a basic key to getting covered by the media!



Contacting the Media: Advisories, Releases and Interviews

Once you have developed your media list, use it wisely. Reserve your communications with reporters for events or stories that are current and newsworthy. Flooding reporters with calls and paper on anything and everything will decrease rather than increase your chances of being covered. Providing new, timely, accurate information on AAUW issues and events helps you build relationships with reporters, and can lead them to view you as a reliable resource on issues important to women and families. Once this happens they may well call YOU rather than the other way around!

There are several different tools used to communicate messages to the media:

Media Advisories

Media Advisories are used to alert the media to an upcoming event, and should be sent three to five days in advance of the activity highlighted. Advisories should be no more than one page in length, and should include only the vital details of your event: who, what, when, where, why.

News Releases

A news release is the standard document for carrying the basic information from your story to the outside world via the media. News releases can be used: to announce AAUW's stand or action on an issue, when AAUW holds an event, to evaluate the work of public officials, to announce the appointment or election of a new leader, or to call for the passage or defeat of legislation.

NEWS RELEASE TIPS

- **Use the Proper Format:** For the first page, use letterhead that includes the AAUW logo, address and phone number. At the top, type "News Release" and in the left corner, "For Immediate Release." Type "More" at the bottom of each page except for on the final page where you should type "###" which indicates that the news release is finished. Include a centered title, in all caps.
- **Keep it Simple:** Your news release should read like a news story. Use a headline to attract attention to your release. Say the most important things first, and use a catchy lead sentence to engage your reader. Less important information should be put in following paragraphs, and in general paragraphs should be limited to one or two sentences. Include quotes, but don't use too many.
- **Keep it Short:** Limit the release to one or if absolutely necessary, two pages.
- **Use a Fax:** Whenever possible, distribute news releases via fax. Some reporters accept e-mail communications, but don't assume this unless they have told you it is their preference.
- **Follow-up:** Follow-up the release with phone calls to the news outlets to make sure they received the release and to urge them to cover the story. If an outlet did not receive it, offer to send it again.



Other Visibility Tools

You don't have to hold an event or send a news release to draw attention to AAUW priority issues. There are many tools you can use to gain visibility and promote AAUW priority issues.

Letters to the Editor



Writing letters to the editor of your local paper is a great way to energize branch members, promote AAUW visibility in the community, and spread the word about important issues. Letters to the editor (LTEs) can be used to correct and clarify facts in a previous news story, oppose or support the actions of an elected official or agency, direct attention to a problem, spur news editors to cover an issue that is being overlooked, or urge readers to support your cause. LTEs are especially effective in local, community papers. You can send letters by fax, e-mail, or through the mail.

TIPS ON EFFECTIVE LTEs

- **Pick a timely topic:** Newspapers rarely publish letters on topics that are not already being covered in the news.
- **Assume nothing:** Do not assume that your readers are informed on your topic. Give a concise but informative background before plunging into the main issue. Refer to any newspaper article or editorial to which you are responding by date and title. Also include any relevant credentials that prove you are informed about your topic.
- **Be brief.** State your position as succinctly as possible without eliminating necessary detail. Most paper's length limit on LTEs is around 250 words.
- **Find a local angle:** Readers are more interested in an issue when they see how it affects their lives and communities. Show how your issue will affect this particular readership.
- **Avoid form letters:** Do not send the same letter to two competing papers in the same circulation area, or many copies of an identical letter to a single paper.

SAMPLE LTE

Dear Editor:

As a member of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), I urge you to oppose attempts to weaken America's public education system by redirecting already scarce funds away from public schools. *(You can fill in details about the bill here.)*

AAUW has long fought against diversion of public funds to private or religious elementary and secondary schools because: private and religious schools can reject students based on the school's own admissions criteria, which do not have to conform to federal non-discrimination laws; private and religious schools are not under meaningful public control by popularly elected officials; and using federal funds for religious education violates the establishment of religion clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (separation of church and state).

AAUW believes that the proper remedy for failing school systems is to improve public schools, rather than diverting public funds into private and religious institutions.

Sincerely,
AAUW member

Opinion-Editorial Pieces



Opinion editorial (Op-ed) pieces, are printed "opposite the editorial page" and are written by community leaders and syndicated columnists, not by the newspapers staff writers. Op-eds are lengthier than LTEs and are somewhat more substantive pieces, averaging 700 words in length. Op-ed articles can be very influential in shaping public debate, and can serve as stepping stones to interview requests. Contact the newspaper's op-ed page editor and ask for their guidelines.

TIPS ON EFFECTIVE OP-EDS

- **Pick a Timely and Local Topic:** Op-eds should relate to a current event and have a definite point of view, but they should not be reactions to a published article (use LTEs for that purpose). Choose an issue that has a local impact, and use a specific person, group or event to show how your community is affected.
- **Research Guidelines:** Most papers have a length limit on op-eds. It is usually around 700 words, but be sure to find out before you begin writing.
- **Include a cover letter:** Include a concise, one-page cover letter with your submission explaining why the op-ed is important to the newspaper's readers. If you are sending your op-ed to more than one paper, be sure to mention that in your cover letter.
- **Focus on One Idea:** Concentrate on one theme or issue and organize your thoughts in a clear and logical order. Present the issue in the first paragraph and offer suggestions in the second or third paragraphs. Limit your paragraphs to two or three sentences, avoid technical terms and insider jargon, and back up assertions with facts.
- **Get a Signatory:** Most papers prefer printing op-eds written by a local authority or community leader. Having an AAUW office holder or member with expertise on the topic sign your op-ed will make it more likely to be chosen.
- **Follow-up:** If you do not hear anything from the paper within a few days of submitting your op-ed, call to make sure it was received.



EDITORIAL BOARD MEETINGS

Editorials are written by a newspaper editorial staff and reflect the opinions of the paper's owners and editors, and are often influential with decision makers. While you can't just tell an editorial board what to write and expect it to appear in print, you can make a case for an editorial on a current issue of importance to the paper's readership, and provide information on behalf of your cause. Most editorial writers want to fully understand all sides of an issue before they take a position. If they think your cause is good and relevant to the community they may well support it.

TIPS

Arrange a Meeting: Call the editorial page editor, identify yourself and your organization, explain why you want to meet and ask to schedule a meeting. Explain why your topic is timely, local, and of concern to the newspapers readers.

Know Your Paper's Headlines: If you are asking the paper to take a stand you should know what they have reported about the topic in the past.

Be Prepared for the Meeting: Keep the meeting small and informal; bring a short, written statement that explains the most important points of the issue.

Radio



There are several different ways that you might get your message on the air. One is an "actuality," or brief pre-recorded statement or interview that is played during the station's news segment. Radio stations often play the same news segment throughout the day so actualities can get coverage for your story and generate interest in your issue.

Radio talk shows are another venue, and have become popular forums for voicing public opinion and communicating a point of view. Calling in to a show that is covering an issue important to AAUW is one way to gain access to these shows, another is to actually be a guest. When on the air be confident and positive, keep it simple and make sure you have notes in front of you.

RADIO INTERVIEW HELPFUL HINTS

Whether you are recording, interviewing live, or participating in a talk show as a panelist your goal is to be polished and deliver a colorful sound bite. The tips below will help you get on the air and sound great!

- **Pursue the Stations:** If you know of an upcoming event, alert the radio station ahead of time with a news advisory and be sure to follow-up with a phone call. Be aware, however, that radio news directors often do not have time to attend news conferences or public hearings. You will improve your odds of getting coverage if you call the station's news director, explain your organization and event, and offer a phone interview.
- **Call Early:** Call the stations early in the morning. Avoid calling them on the hour or half-hour since they are often doing live news shows then.
- **Be Prepared to Interview:** The newscaster may want you to elaborate on the story before s/he expresses interest or will want to put you on tape immediately. Be prepared for either. Have three key points ready before you make the call.
- **Stay focused:** The station will usually edit the interview so keep your answers brief and to the point, and state the most relevant and important facts first.
- **Don't Fake It:** If you don't know the answer to a question, just say you don't know. Offer to call back if appropriate.
- **Sound Interesting:** Your voice should never sound monotone. Stress the interesting and important facts and figures.
- **Reiterate Message:** Since your interview may be edited, reiterate and repeat your basic message as often as possible. This will increase the chances that it gets into the final version and is not edited out.
- **Pitch Small Stations First:** Offer your interview to smaller, less important stations first. This will warm you up for the larger stations and help you predict the types of questions you may be asked.
- **Correct Mistakes:** If at any point the interviewer says something that is inaccurate, feel free to politely interrupt and correct the mistake.

Television Interviews



Whether you are on a live talk show or being taped for the local evening news, the following tips will help you make the most of a TV interview.

TELEVISION INTERVIEW HELPFUL HINTS

- **Pick the Right Spokesperson:** First and foremost, your spokesperson should be someone who understands the issue and AAUW's position well. Ideally, your spokesperson should have some experience.
- **Master the Sound bite:** A sound bite is a quote or succinct one-liner that summarizes an idea in a colorful but simple manner. Be brief and direct. Avoid jargon, use analogies, and be personal by explaining how the issue affects this particular audience.
- **Know Your Show:** Before you have your interview you should watch several episodes of the talk show or news broadcast to familiarize yourself with the show and with the types of questions your interviewer might ask. Ask ahead of time about the overall format of the show, including whether your interview is taped or live and if there will be a studio audience. If you are on a talk show, find out if there are other guests and the order of appearance and familiarize yourself with their affiliations and positions.
- **Know Your Message:** Before the interview, know the main points you want to make. Anticipate questions but do not over-rehearse because you want to sound natural. Steer the interview toward the points you want to make, and always try to bring your comments back to your main message.
- **Reiterate Your Points:** Make an effort to repeat your major point over and over, especially in taped interviews. Remember that portions of the interview may be edited, and you don't want to risk having your main point edited out. Take advantage of pauses in the interview to make your point. You have a right to complete your answers, so if you are interrupted, politely and firmly insist on finishing your answer. Request clarification if you are asked a question you do not understand, and do not fudge facts and figures. Bring visuals along if they will help make your point more memorable.
- **Pay Attention to Body Language:** Movements and mannerisms can seem magnified on television—avoid exaggerated hand movements, fidgeting, or saying "you know" or "um" repeatedly. Look at the interviewer, not the camera. Use moderate hand gestures, smile and nod.
- **Assume You Are Always On Camera:** Even if you think the camera is focusing on someone else, act like you are on camera at all times. Do not say anything, even jokingly, that could be taken out of context or picked up and used out of context. When you are in the studio, assume the cameras are always rolling.
- **Dress Carefully:** You don't want your attire to garner more attention than your message. Dress in solid colored, simple suits or dresses. Avoid light colors, busy patterns, sparkling or noisy jewelry and heavy make-up.

SAMPLE NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
[Date]

Contact: [Name]
Phone Number: [Phone]

PROTECT SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS FOR WOMEN AAUW Hosts Women's Summit on Social Security Reform

The headline should grab the reader's attention and anticipate the first paragraph.

The first paragraph should contain all the relevant information (who, what, when, where, why, and how).

[Town, State]—To ensure that Social Security benefits for women and families are protected and strengthened, the [branch name] of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) today sponsored a Women's Summit on Social Security at the [location] to discuss Social Security reform.

"Women are more dependent on Social Security than men," said [name] branch president of the AAUW [branch name]. "Not only do women earn less than men, but they spend less time in the paid work force to raise families, and they live longer than men. AAUW believes that any Social Security reforms must protect the economic well being and security of women."

AAUW was joined by [list coalition partners]. The coalition supports provisions to protect elderly women and families:

- **The President's Commission on Social Security reform and Congress should preserve the full cost of living adjustments to protect against inflation.** This provision is particularly important to women because they live longer, rely more on Social Security, and lack other sources of income. Only 20 percent of women over age 65 receive pensions, versus 47 percent of men. Further, their average pension income is \$2,682 annually, compared to \$5,731 for men.
- **The President's Commission on Social Security reform and Congress must maintain a progressive benefit formula.** Women and others who earn low wages over their lifetime must continue to be compensated with a larger share of their past earnings to protect them from poverty. In 1997, the poverty rate among elderly women was 13 percent (compared to 7 percent for men). Without Social Security benefits, it would have been 52 percent.
- **The President's Commission on Social Security reform and Congress must protect spousal benefits.** Sixty-three percent of women on Social Security receive benefits based on their husbands' earnings, while only 1.2 percent of men receive benefits based on their wives' earning.
- **The President's Commission on Social Security reform and Congress must preserve disability and survivor benefits** that go to children and widows in the event of a premature death or disability of a working parent or spouse. Over three million children currently receive these benefits, which enable women to hold their families together under tragic circumstances.

Put details in the third paragraph

"Over a lifetime, women earn an average of a quarter of a million dollars less than men," said [name] branch president. "These women, who have considerably less to save and invest for retirement, would clearly be harmed by any privatization of the Social Security system."

Quotes should include a sound bite or visual image.

The coalition, lead by AAUW, will continue a grassroots campaign to education the public, lawmakers, and the media to mobilize support for strengthening Social Security.

AAUW, representing over 100,000 college graduates and more than 1,300 branches, is the nation's leading advocate for education and equity for women and girls. Please visit our web site at www.aauw.org for more information.

###

Use -30- or the symbol ### to signify the end of the release.

American Association of University Women

Media Sign-in Sheet

<u>NAME</u>	<u>OUTLET</u>	<u>PHONE</u>	<u>Fax</u>	<u>E-mail</u>
1.	_____	_____	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____	_____	_____
6.	_____	_____	_____	_____
7.	_____	_____	_____	_____
8.	_____	_____	_____	_____
9.	_____	_____	_____	_____
10.	_____	_____	_____	_____
11.	_____	_____	_____	_____
12.	_____	_____	_____	_____