

# Communicating with the Media

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## SUMMARY

- Craft a consistent message that articulates your institution's goals
- Identify and train spokespersons to represent you in the media
- Find reporters who cover your subject and create a media list
- Use press releases to announce news
- Write letters to the editor to comment on local or national news
- Contact IB North America and let us know about your press opportunity

Working with the media is an important aspect of maintaining a positive profile for your school in the community. The media can help to broadcast activities in your school and let the community know how they can be involved.

Before approaching the media, you will need to prepare. You should always ask yourself, "Is my message newsworthy?" Who is your spokesperson? Additionally, the IB North America office can act as a resource for you. If you are working with the press, let us know!

## Messaging

Crafting a consistent message for your institution is important for effective communication. Ideally, your mission statement is easy to articulate and includes not only your institution's involvement with IB, but also how it has tailored those programs to the unique needs of its students.

## Identify Spokespersons

Identify one to three spokespersons who are articulate, approachable, and have expertise in the field about which they'll be speaking. As you build relationships with members of your local media, let them know you have experts on staff available for comment when needed.

## Media Training

Even seasoned media pros benefit from a refresher on skills for speaking with the media. Be sure that your spokespersons are:

- Well-versed in the institution's identity and are able to articulate the mission statement in their own words
- Aware of their intended audience and how to speak to that audience's needs and interests

- Comfortable with their specific talking points and able to elaborate on them in their own words
- Aware of topics or language to avoid
- Prepared to answer questions and have substantive answers for anticipated queries

## Approaching the Media

The way you present your news, who you contact, and how you contact them will be very similar for print (newspapers and magazines) and broadcast (television and radio) media outlets.

### Who to contact?

If you read your local newspaper and watch the local news on a regular basis, you are probably familiar with the reporters who cover education and community issues and can send them your news directly. Many media outlets publish online contact information for all of their reporters as well as offer archives of the articles they've written recently. If you are not sure what reporters cover your subject, you can send your news to the assignment editor.

As you come across journalists that cover your areas of interest or as you contact journalists, keep a list of the contacts. In this way, you can begin to compile a press list.

### Press Releases

Press releases are a way for you to announce news and information to the media. Journalists receive a high volume of press releases. It is very important that your release have the following characteristics in order to stand out from the crowd:

- Email your press release. Be sure the title of your press release is in the subject line of the email and paste the release into the body of the email. Do not send the release as an attachment.
- Ensure an objective tone. To avoid being labeled by journalists as "fluff," your release must have a factual, objective tone and you must back up any claims with corresponding data or information. Avoid flowery language and overuse of adjectives.
- Use the inverted pyramid structure. Press releases should be structured to present the most important information first, a structure known as the inverted pyramid. This way, if the reader were to stop reading before the end, he or she would still know your message.
- Write in an active, not passive, voice. Your story will be more lively and interesting if you tell it in the active voice rather than the passive voice.
- Keep it concise. One to two pages should be plenty to outline your story. If reporters are interested, they will come to you for additional information.

### Letters to the Editor

Letters to the editor are an easy way to keep your message in the media by writing in response to both local and national issues. For example, if there is an article about a national education issue in your newspaper, you can respond with a letter about how your school approaches the issue. Letters to the editor are also an appropriate way for parents and students to publicly speak out about your school.