

4. USING MEDIA TO ELEVATE YOUR MESSAGE

Media can be a very powerful tool for challenging the myths and stereotypes of chronic homelessness and advancing a new public narrative that supports real solutions. Every single person you know is influenced by media one way or another. The key is knowing when and how to use it.

Media is many things – television, radio, newspapers, blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. We need to change our thinking around “traditional” vs “social” media and treat them as equally valuable tools for telling stories. Every one of these media platforms serves a different purpose, reaches a different audience, and can effectively carry your message to whomever you’re trying to reach.

WHO IS MY AUDIENCE?

The most important thing to identify is “who is my audience?” Your audience will determine which media platform(s) to use. For instance, are you trying to influence a legislator? Then, newspapers or radio are good platforms. Are you trying to engage like-minded people in your movement? Then social media is a good tool. Are you trying to change public opinion? Then your message needs to be on every media platform possible.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Do not ignore the power of social media! It can be the most effective and versatile tool you have to change public opinion and build a movement. Virtually everyone is on social media in one way or another – lawmakers, their staff, reporters, news outlets, organizations, and like minded people. You can use social media (mainly Facebook and Twitter) for just about anything: telling your personal story, recruiting people to your movement, promoting news stories about your issues, starting conversations with news outlets and other organizations, or producing your own content.

TIP

Use your own media consumption habits, as well as those of your friends, family, and especially, people who consume media differently than you, to help guide your decision about how to best reach your intended audience. Once you’ve decided who you want to reach, then you can decide how you want to reach them.

Twitter is a great tool for quickly sharing information such as an article published with your message in it, or a bill that just got passed. It can be organized using hashtags, so that all tweets that fall in a certain category can be seen together. “Live tweeting” can be a helpful tool during an event, so that the message can spread to people who are not in attendance. Think of Twitter as a way to share “breaking news”. Follow the Housing Alliance Twitter account [@WLIHA](#).

Facebook is better for “bulletin board” type message sharing. Your messages can be longer, contain more detailed information, and it will show up in your followers news feeds over the course of hours or sometimes days, so there is opportunity for more people to see it and share it. Many people use both Facebook and Twitter, but there is also a large contingent who only monitor one or the other.

For more on using social media for advocacy, visit the [Housing Alliance’s social media advocacy resource center](#) online.

NEWS MEDIA

News reporting outlets are famously understaffed these days, so getting the attention of a reporter to cover your story can be difficult if you don’t already have a relationship. One of the best ways to reach reporters working in TV,

Paying for facebook ads to promote your content or organize your membership doesn’t have to be expensive and is a great way to boost your overall visibility and to keep people engaged.

TIP

radio, newspapers and blogs is to write a press release advertising your event, positioning statement, a new report or whatever “news hook” you have to pique their interest. Do your homework and target your press release to a specific reporter who you know covers housing and homelessness issues. Personalize it so it doesn’t look like a blast that went out to the masses. Then, follow up the next day with a phone call, message on Facebook, or tweet at them to start a dialogue. Reporters get dozens of press releases a day, you have to work hard to make yours stand out.

Remember: Reporters are people too. Your pitch has to be interesting, multilayered (for example, it includes a personal story to accompany data) and most importantly, it must be timely. If you don’t give them a reason why your story should be printed *right now*, they’ll find another story to write.

TIP

For more on how to write a press release, [see our guide online](#).

If you can't get a reporter to cover your story for the audience you're targeting, try writing an op-ed or letter to the editor for a newspaper or blog in your area.

Opinion editorials are typically 600-700 words (depending on the publication) and are an opportunity to talk in detail about the issue you are trying to educate your audience about. It must be thoughtful and informative, and written by a figure of authority, like the executive director or board chair of a nonprofit organization, or an elected official.

Letters to the Editor can also be effective depending on the audience you're trying to reach. LTEs are typically 200 words (depending on the paper) and are written in response to a published article, or lack of coverage on an issue. Like op-eds, LTEs need to be thoughtful and well written in order to get published, and work best when they are making the case for a point of view that hasn't already been published in that paper. LTEs and op-eds are often how papers achieve a "fair and balanced" perspective.

TIP

Though this is a dying form of actually moving public opinion, lawmakers still read LTEs from their constituents. Effort should only be put in to LTEs if you're trying to move a particular lawmaker, and you must get it published in the paper of record *in their district*.

For more on how to write an LTE or op-ed, [see our guide online](#).

The key is to know your audience and have a presence wherever they are. There is so much information flying around, and so many places to get it, it's hard to cut through all that noise. Remember, people don't dig deep to seek out information anymore. Your message has to show up where they are already looking. For any media campaign, you must adapt your message frame for a variety of platforms to be sure you are reaching everyone you can. Be simple, clear, and concise, and then repeat. See the Appendix for a specific guide on which media platforms to use to reach your target audience.