



HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE Local Media

:: A Guide for Non-Governmental Organizations and Citizens' Initiatives ::



Academy for Educational Development



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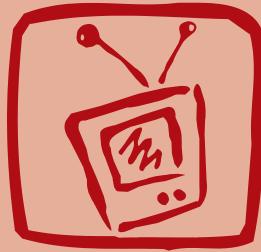
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HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE Local Media

“The media has great influence on citizens in terms of making them aware of their local communities. Every time we appear in the media, there are a greater number of those who want to take a more active part in solving the problems of the local community, or who would like to be informed about the

ways in which they can contribute to its development.”

Admira Mahmutović
Ecological center
“Caput insulae Beli”
Primorje — Gorski kotar
County, Istria, Primorje and
Rijeka



:: Introduction ::

The media and NGOs/Local Citizens’ Initiatives (LCIs) are component parts of civil society. Since the goals of both of these sectors are of benefit to all citizens, more can be accomplished if they work together. Without the media, it would be very difficult for an NGO/LCI to gain public recognition regardless of its undoubtedly valuable work. On the other hand, when journalists decide to write about a certain topic, they often lack expert information, which they can easily obtain from NGOs dealing with that issue. Also, NGOs/LCIs are excellent sources of news, actions, events and all the other matters in which journalists are interested.

Despite these natural synergies, the relationship between NGOs and media is often inadequate. NGOs/LCIs often complain that they do not get enough media coverage and that the significance of their work is not recognized in the community. The editorial policies of the media do not generally recognize the importance of the work of non-profit organizations. Also, there are few journalists specialized in writing about the work of NGOs or that cover specific fields in which particular NGOs are involved. Furthermore, the media often complain that NGOs are inadequately prepared for appearances in the media. The fact that NGOs often work under poor conditions and that their members are not skilled in communicating with the media is not taken into account. Communication between NGOs and the media is mainly limited to press conferences, which have shortcomings and are not in themselves particularly interesting to journalists. Reporters expect NGOs to be imaginative and innovative and to present their work in an interesting way.

This situation can be resolved by developing relationships between the media and NGOs, sensitizing the media to certain societal problems, and by improving the quality of communication with the media within the NGOs/LCIs themselves. The media can become important allies in a particular campaign or action, but they do not have to. Therefore, it is important for NGOs/LCIs to devote sufficient attention and time to working with the media.

:: BEFORE COMMUNICATING
WITH THE MEDIA ::



“It is very important to cooperate with the media since they are the link between NGOs and the local community. It is through media presentations that an NGO becomes available to a wider audience and this kind of relationship and cooperation should be encouraged and cherished.”

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Rasti Nikolić
“ZUM —
Organization for
stimulation of
employment and
professional
development of
young people”

:: Before Communicating with the Media ::

B Whether you work in a recently founded initiative or a well-known NGO, successful communication with the media requires certain preparation. While this requires significant effort, in the end, the results will make it worthwhile.

a> Organizational preparation

Before communicating with the media, each NGO/LCI should conduct organizational preparations needed for its proper functioning, both internal and towards the wider public. This is, above all, related to a clear NGO/LCI mission, strategic plan, financial plan, and a division of labor within the NGO/LCI itself.

Defining activities and goals is as important as finding a work space and human resources, and has a significant impact on an organization's public image. If you work in an LCI, you will probably focus only on defining the goals of the initiative and division of labor. Sooner or later, journalists will also want to have that information.

b> Technical preparation/media database

Without media coverage, an NGO/LCI will have difficulty attracting the recognition and support of a large number of citizens and sponsors. Media coverage ensures an increase in societal awareness of a certain problem and assists in the cultivation of allies and friends. An appearance by your NGO/LCI in the media may lead to new volunteers contacting you or a local business person deciding to support your organization's activities. Some media are more open to NGOs than others, but every NGO/LCI can attract the attention of the media if it presents its activities in the right way.



Every NGO/LCI should have a designated person to coordinate contact with the media. However, to most effectively promote an NGO, more NGO/LCI staff and/or members should be included in this important area of work as well. In that way, you are prepared even if your media coordinator is sick or otherwise unable to do his/her job when journalists inquire about the position of your NGO/LCI on a certain issue. Furthermore, the public appearance of a number of activists from a particular NGO indicates its strength and diversity.

Before contacting the media, an NGO/LCI media coordinator should, with the help of a colleague, list in a table all the media present in the local community, as well as outside of the local community if necessary. When developing this table, other NGOs or the Internet might be useful resources. Telephone and fax numbers as well as e-mail addresses of the media and journalists are extremely important for rapid communication and thus have to be updated regularly.

Your list should include:

- :> newspaper agencies
- :> radio and television stations and their local branches
- :> daily newspapers and their local publications
- :> the most important magazines covering your field of work
- :> Internet portals
- :> weekly newspapers and their local publications
- :> business and other specialized newsletters
- :> newsletters of national and other minorities

example 1.

List of Media/Journalists						
Media	reporter	telephone	fax	mob. phone	e-mail	web
Radio Budućnost, Priobalje	Šime Pilić	01/896-5487	01/896-5472	098-285-4789	sime@radio.hr	www. radio-buducnost.hr

When making your media contact list, you should get in touch with the media in order to find out which journalists are responsible for covering the work of non-government organizations (in a larger geographic area) or which journalist covers events in a certain local community. If there is not such a journalist, you can ask around to find out if anyone has acquaintances in the media, and then try to contact these media representatives, especially if you are not satisfied with the way your work is covered in the media. It is best to find out what the problem is — is it a result of the media's editorial policy or using the wrong approach to the media? A journalist might tell you that according to their editorial policy they do not attend NGO press conferences, but they are interested in public actions or panel discussions, and by talking to these journalists personally you may interest them in your work.

Your media coordinator should follow the media on a daily basis, especially their coverage of topics in which your NGO is involved. In this way, you will be better able to react to a certain problem or give a statement that reflects your current position in a timely manner. For example, a journalist could ask for a comment on a certain decision of the Town Council, but if you are not familiar with that decision, you will not be prepared to give a statement.

c> Media strategy and media campaigns

Before contacting the media, it is necessary to develop a **strategy** for media appearances, whether this relates to a one-time action or ongoing dynamics within a project.

When you are developing a media strategy, you should answer the following questions:

1. What goal does your NGO/LCI want to achieve through a media campaign?
2. What audience do you want to send a message to?
3. What message do you want to convey to the public?
4. What resources do you have?



After you have answered all of these questions, you can start creating your media campaign (i.e. plan your appearances in the media). Public appearances in the media can be paid for or free. If your NGO/LCI has financial means, it can pay for a media campaign (i.e. for making audio and video spots, paid newspaper ads, radio ads, etc.) If this is the first time that you are developing a media campaign, it would be best to ask more experienced colleagues or media experts for help.

If you do not have financial resources available (as is generally the case with NGOs) you must be well prepared in order to ensure media coverage. In the event that some of your members are skilled in fundraising, you can seek funds for your media campaign from local businesses or governments. In order to run a media campaign as efficiently as possible, you need to create a **media plan** and a calendar of your appearances in the media, which serve as a means of evaluating the success of your plan. In drawing up the media plan you should make sure that the appearances are evenly distributed within the given time span. For example, if your plan covers a period of one month, try to be present in the media every week, rather than just sending a lot of information to journalists during the first week. You should also take into consideration external factors that can considerably affect your plan, such as scheduling your press conference at the same time as conferences or events of other important institutions.

example 2.

Media plan				
MON/May 1	TUE/May 2	WED/May 3	THU/May 4	FRI/May 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • send invitations • call reporters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prepare to give a statement • prepare written materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • press conference • send a note to the media • control appearance in the media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • control appearance in the media • file press clippings • evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supplement to the media report

You cannot, of course, plan all your media presentations — sometimes you will have to react immediately to media calls and record them later in your media calendar.

The quality of a media campaign should be assessed once it is completed. If you accomplished the stated goal, you can consider the campaign as having been successful, whether you had funds for it or not.

::> Bird of Paradise — For many years “Bird of Paradise” has provided services to mentally retarded children in Karlovac County. With CroNGO support, the NGO concentrated on raising public awareness of the needs of mentally retarded persons and their way of life within the community. The NGO has been very effective in using the media to present its activities to promote inclusion of the mentally retarded in everyday community life. Unfortunately, during implementation of its CroNGO-funded project, “Bird of Paradise” lost its office space which was indispensable for running workshops and other activities. The NGO decided to work with the media to share this problem with the local community. As the local press has long covered the work of “Bird of Paradise”, reporters were very interested in helping the NGO with its campaign to find an adequate space. A series of related articles in local newspapers encouraged the Karlovac City government to provide a city-owned space to the NGO. “Bird of Paradise” now has a space in the center of town that is accessible to all of its beneficiaries, members of their families, and other citizens. Furthermore, during this intense media action, the NGO received countless expressions of goodwill and support for their future work from people across the entire county.

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:: HOW TO COMMUNICATE
WITH THE FREE MEDIA ::



“It is essential to put effort into increasing networking levels – the free forms of recreation, volunteering, new ways of helping people in the community. The media are interested in the development of an LCI because the stress is put on developing the local community. Such forms of taking interest in social issues should be an expression of civil society and pooling of organizations.”

Slobodan Vujović
Director and chief editor of
Radio OK



::: How to Communicate with the Free Media :::

It is very difficult to get free media coverage. The free media are considered to be all the public appearances in the media that your NGO/LCI gets for free. They could be called the ‘deserved media’, since every NGO/LCI has to earn this media coverage through their activities and continual work with the media.

Approaching the local media is generally easier than drawing the attention of national media for many reasons:

- :> local media cover a smaller number of events
- :> local media are more interested in local events
- :> local media often lack quality information about certain issues, because they do not have teams of journalists to cover particular topics

The main task in getting media attention is to convince journalists that you are worthy of their interest (i.e. that you will provide them with **news**). The value of your news depends on the right timing, relevance to readers or listeners, possible consequences, importance and interest. It also depends on your presentation skills (i.e. your ability to convince journalists that you really are news).

Most NGOs/LCIs have two ‘big chances’ to ensure media attention. The first one is an **announcement** of the beginning of NGO/LCI activities, actions or projects and the second chance is at the **end** of a project to announce the results and the goals you have (or have not) achieved. The obstacles that you come across in your work can also be newsworthy. Do not expect to get immediate media attention each time you talk to a journalist or give a statement during a press conference. Also, do not contact journalists if you do not have anything to say, because after a while they will stop covering even the most important parts of your work.

It is important that all your employees and members use common language when addressing the media so as not to leave journalists with the impression that the NGO/LCI does not have a clear position on relevant issues. The easiest way to achieve this is to coordinate your positions before the actual campaign and to prepare simple promotional materials with basic information that can easily be remembered and understood by both your employees and the target audience.

Many times one might get **negative media coverage**. Negative news and stories are frequently based on a perceived crisis, scandal or inappropriate action, and can be very damaging. Not paying enough attention to the media and informing them on time can affect your reputation with journalists, and they may start to write negatively about you.

A successful media strategy should be based on getting quality and useful media coverage, but at the same time, be prepared for possible dangerous and awkward situations. You should make a list of 'tricky' questions, answer them and rehearse your responses. As a rule, an NGO/LCI should avoid giving answers such as "it is a business secret", even if the public might not like the answers you give. This is why good preparation is so important. For example, journalists often like to ask questions about the financial resources of NGOs/LCIs. Your answer might be: "XY donated 60,000 kn", but you could also answer like this: "After preparing a project proposal and sending it to a dozen different addresses, XY approved 60,000 kn for the following purposes... After the project is finished, we will submit a written financial report and copies of all receipts to the donor".

In order to be as visible in the media as frequently as possible, you could use a celebrity who supports your work as a "lure" for journalists. You may also want to choose an interesting venue for your press conference in order to illustrate a certain problem and thus give the audience a chance to realize the consequences of (not) trying to find a solution.

For example, the fact that garbage has been deposited in an illegal dump is not news, but the fact that it was scientifically proven that the infiltration of underground waters into the water supply system increased cancerous diseases by thirty times is news.

a> Ways of communicating with the media

REPORTS, STATEMENTS AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

Most NGOs/LCIs regularly send out information and public reports. Each of these materials has to be supported by facts and answer all of the following questions: WHO? WHAT? WHERE? WHEN? WHY? and HOW?

Design the heading of your report for a particular purpose with a clearly visible, simple logo and graphically accentuated name of the NGO/LCI, as well as your address and telephone number. Make sure that your report is not too long and that it is concise and understandable, as this will increase the chances of publication and decrease the danger of an editor intervening and shortening your text. Sentences should be short and clear and suitable for reading on radio and television stations.

Keep in mind that you should send reports only when it is really necessary, so that journalists will not mistake an unimportant issue for an important one. It is preferable to send reports to the same journalists that you have contacted before, or to ones who cover the field related to the issues covered in the report. When you send a report, it is always good to call the journalists you know, acquaint them with the issues and ask them to see that the report is publicly announced, especially if it is intended for a wide audience.

PRESS CONFERENCE

Press conferences are held every time you have important news for the public. The conference has to meet the same standards as for news or a public report, but it also has to be visually attractive to television cameras and photographers.

After you have reached agreement within your NGO/LCI, call a press conference by inviting journalists from your media list one or two days ahead of time.



example 3.

Invitation to a press conference

Non-governmental organization Purgatory

Keršovanijev trg 2, 45850 Priobalje
tel: 045 236 945, fax: 045 236 946, e-mail: marija2@crnet.hr

- to all media
Priobalje, May 1, 2004

INVITATION TO A PRESS CONFERENCE

We invite you to attend a press conference that will be held on **Wednesday, May 3, 2004 at 12:00 noon in front of the main entrance to the complex “Bijelo jezero” (The White Pond) in Priobalje.**

The topic of the conference will be the beginning of the action **“Cleaning to Health”** that will take place May 3-5, 2004 and in which the volunteers of our NGO, high school students and citizens are going to participate. Mayor Marko Čavrak has confirmed his attendance.

For all additional information please contact our spokesperson Marija Parać, phone: 091 36 9 54 02.

We look forward to seeing you.

Best regards,

For the action “Cleaning to health”
Ivica Zuber — coordinator 098 75 48 6 95

Before the journalists arrive, it is good to have all materials about the topic ready. It is best for journalists to have everything in writing, so that they can follow you and convey the information correctly.

example 4.

Press Statement

Non-governmental organization Purgatory

Keršovanijev trg 2, 45850 Priobalje

tel: 045 236 945, fax: 045 236 946, e-mail: marija2@crnet.hr

Priobalje, May 2, 2004

PRESS STATEMENT

regarding the action

“Cleaning to Health”

The goal of the action “Cleaning to Health” is to create a pleasant and useful environment around the pond that will later serve all residents of Priobalje as a picnic site. The NGO Purgatory calls on all activists, volunteers and citizens disturbed by the heavy stench and the piles of garbage around the White Pond, which has not been cleaned for years.

The action will take place **May 3-5, 2004**, every day from **12 p.m. to 6 p.m.** The coordinator of the action is Mr. Ivica Zuber who is in charge of the organization and distribution of materials.

We are sending invitations to all primary and secondary schools, environmental organizations and pensioners’ organizations and we expect a large number of citizens to join the action.

The action is supported by all town councilors, and our NGO has received 10,000 kn from the town council.

We would like to invite all citizens interested in this action to join us and do a good deed for themselves and the environment that we all live in.

Spokesperson
Marija Parać



A desk with the materials should be positioned near the entrance to the press conference and you should also prepare an attendance list so that you know which media attended your conference.

example 5.

name and surname	medium	telephone	fax	e-mail
Marko Šimić	Priroda i društvo	091-745-9836	045-241-784	marko@ekologija.com
Jasmina Ivić	Radio Priobalje	045-352-485	045-352-496	—

Journalist List

Make sure that there is enough promotional material (basic information about the NGO/LCI — when it was founded, how many employees there are, how many activists and volunteers you have, what the budget is, etc.), an annual report (if there is one), leaflets, flyers, posters, etc. Answer the questions readily. Try to hold the whole conference in 30 minutes.

Some media do not have enough journalists to cover all interesting events, and to some press conferences are not particularly interesting. However, if you inform journalists that you held a press conference, they may still publish information about your action or call you to get a statement.

- **Why?** Press conferences give the media a chance to record and hear your statements and information about your NGO/campaign/action and to ask questions. The people holding the press conference should be prepared and self-confident.
- **Where?** Choose a suitable venue carefully. If it is a room, it should be quiet, not too big and you should check if it can easily be reached. If you hold the conference outdoors (e.g. in front of an institution), have an alternative place ready in case of bad weather. The simplest solution is usually to hold a press conference in your office, but journalists find this to be the least attractive location. Why? Because all government and political institutions also hold press conferences in their premises. Therefore, choose an interesting location related to the topic of the press conference (e.g. at a city dump or outside the City Council).

- :> **When?** Find out about the journalists' deadlines. Press conferences are usually held at 10:00 or 11:00 a.m. so that the journalists can report about them in the radio news at noon, television news in the evening and in the following day's newspaper columns. You should carefully choose the day of your conference: organize it on the eve of a day when newspapers are bought in greater numbers (e.g. on Fridays there is a TV program included in newspapers and on Saturdays advertisements are printed). However, a number of other institutions also take these facts into account. Ask journalists before the press conference if there is another one scheduled at the same time, and if that is the case, postpone the start of your conference so a greater number of journalists can attend. If you expect television reporters to come, invite them two days ahead of time, otherwise, you can invite them the morning before. Send the invitations to editorial offices and inform the journalists who usually cover your work about the press conference and tell them that you would like them to report about your conference. It will help you to build a long-term relationship with specific journalists since those journalists will have prior information about your NGO.
- :> **How?** Decorate the background with posters or other promotional materials, make sure that there are enough seats for the journalists, and position yourself so that the cameras can clearly see you and that journalists can hear you. There should be enough space for radio microphones and tape recorders in front of the speaker. If possible, offer the journalists a cup of coffee or juice.
- :> **Who?** Key NGO/LCI persons must be present at the press conference. Your media coordinator opens and closes the press conference, introduces the speakers and coordinates the asking and answering of questions.
- :> **What?** Press conferences are opened by presenting the topic and speakers, and also by thanking the media representatives for coming. Then the topic is discussed. When doing this, try to read from notes as little as possible and to look at the journalists present as much as possible. At the end, journalists ask questions. The press conference ends after responses are provided to the journalists' questions.

Some media do not have enough journalists to cover all interesting events, and others are not interested in press conferences. However, in the event that you send them an announcement after the conference, there is still a possibility that they will announce your information or call you for a statement.



example 6.

Note on press conference held

Non-governmental organization Purgatory

Keršovanijev trg 2, 45850 Priobalje
tel: 045 236 945, fax: 045 236 946, e-mail: marija2@crnet.hr

Priobalje, May 3, 2004

NOTE ON THE PRESS CONFERENCE HELD

regarding the action

“Cleaning to Health”

A press conference was held on **Wednesday, May 3, 2004 at 12 noon in front of the main entrance into the complex “The White Pond” in Priobalje.**

The speakers at the conference were **Ivica Zuber, the coordinator of the action, and Marko Čavrak, Mayor of Priobalje.**

The topic of the press conference was the beginning of the action **“Cleaning to Health”** that will take place from May 3-5, 2004 and in which the volunteers of the NGO, high school students and the citizens will participate. The NGO Purgatory summoned activists, volunteers and other citizens disturbed by the heavy stench and the garbage piled up around the White Pond, which has not been cleaned up for years. The main goal of the action **“Cleaning to Health”** is to create a pleasant and useful environment around the pond, which will later serve as a picnic site for all residents of Priobalje.

Mayor Čavrak has spoken highly of the action and stated that he is ready to help other organizations that are active in the local community.

Ivica Zuber pointed out that citizens, to the satisfaction of the NGO, responded to the action in great numbers and thanked the town council for their support and financial donation of 10,000 kn. He also invited all citizens to join the action and informed them that they can obtain further details from the NGO or by telephone at 045/236-945.

For all additional information, please contact me at 091-3695-402.

Spokesperson
Marija Parać

INTERVIEWS

Every interview requires thorough preparations. You should know who will interview you, for which media, when it will be broadcast, the main topic, and the duration of the interview. The media coordinator should give all relevant information to the journalist ahead of time so that she/he will be prepared for the interview. Prepare an interview strategy including the things you want to emphasize and who you will address. If this is an important interview, rehearse it in front of somebody from your NGO. Giving an interview to “Nacional” (a Croatian weekly news magazine), the Croatian radio, a local television station or a local newspaper is not the same. Adapt your public appearance and statements to each of these media because editors will in any event adapt what you say through the titles of articles and shortened text.

If a journalist asks you to give a statement, do not talk for 10 minutes. It is better that to cut your statement short yourself, than to leave it up to the journalist to decide which parts to publish and which ones to leave out. When giving a statement over the phone, if you do not know what to say, or if the journalist has ambushed you, say that you are very busy at the moment and ask them to call you back in 15 minutes. It will buy you the time you need to get familiarized with the topic in question.

b> Advice for giving interviews/statements

TV interview/statement

- :> Prepare your answers — if you did not receive the questions prior to the interview, predict them and rehearse your answers. It is quite normal for you to get stage fright — this is why you need to rehearse.
- :> Prepare all materials as for a press conference — basic information about your NGO/LCI or your project, promotional material, etc.
- :> If the shooting is taking place in the premises of your NGO/LCI, organize the employees and be ready to meet the reporters — they also find the atmosphere within an NGO important. Decide



up front on a place where you are going to stand/sit and make sure that the wall behind you is covered with a poster or some other symbol of your NGO/LCI.

- Television cameras add a few kilograms to a person. When you make a TV appearance it is best to wear a fair colored outfit and to avoid plaid or striped patterns, because they will make your clothes look as if they flicker.
- Your back should be straight and you should not swing.
- Do not make sudden movements and do not gesture too much.
- Ask the reporter to send you the questions or give you the topic and the main points he/she is interested in ahead of time.
- Answer the questions in full sentences, but be concise.
- Speak slowly and clearly, without making long pauses or using jargon.
- If your interview is not live and you are not satisfied with parts of it, ask the reporter to repeat it.

Radio interview/statement

- Prepare all materials as for a press conference — basic information about your NGO/LCI or your project, promotional material, etc.
- Come to the studio at least half an hour early or discuss the main questions with the reporter before you arrive.
- Ask the reporter to send you the questions or give you the topic and the main points he/she is interested in ahead of time.
- Prepare your answers — if you did not receive the questions prior to the interview, predict them and rehearse your answers. It is quite normal to experience stage fright — this is why you need to rehearse.
- Answer the questions in full sentences, but be concise.
- Speak slowly and clearly, without making long pauses or using jargon.
- If your interview is not live and you are not satisfied with parts of it, ask the reporter to repeat it.

Newspaper interview/statement

- Prepare all materials as for a press conference — basic information about your NGO/LCI or your project, promotional material, etc.

- :> The answers in a newspaper interview/statement can be much longer than the ones you give to the electronic media, so you can prepare statistical data, expert analyses, etc. to give to the reporter as a supplement to your interview.
- :> Ask the reporter to send you the questions or give you the topic and the main points he/she is interested in ahead of time.
- :> Prepare your answers — if you did not receive the questions prior to the interview, predict them and rehearse your answers. It is quite normal to experience stage fright — this is why you need to rehearse.
- :> After the interview, you may want to ask the journalist to send you the text for authorization before it is released. Authorization is a process of verification and your signature vouches for the authenticity of your statements. You authorize only your answers whereas the headings and titles depend on the editorial policy of the media.

However, if the topic is not too 'tricky' (i.e. if it is not subject to misinterpretation or does not involve specific/expert terminology), try to answer the questions as precisely as possible in order to avoid the need for authorization. It may be unacceptable or seem strange to journalists when NGO representatives want to authorize their interviews. The authorization process does not exist in the majority of democratic countries and most Croatian journalists see this as interference in their work, especially if it involves radical interventions in their interview. In such cases, original interviews are often entirely changed, because the interviewee decided to "polish up" his/her statements or add some "important" parts or explanations, which burdens the text with irrelevant and tiresome parts.

c> Types of media coverage

Before and after you address the media, editors will decide how to present your statements in accordance with the topic and their respective editorial policies.

BREAKING NEWS: Usually involves an action or something new. No matter how well you prepare your press conference, if the newspapers release breaking news of great importance on the same day,



the media might not even mention your press conference. So, take the necessary precautions: contact journalists you know or who cover “your” topic and send them either a notice about the press conference you held or a statement.

FEATURE STORY: Can have more information than typical news stories and is not that time limited. Your media coordinator should give journalists a reason that they should write a feature story about your NGO/LCI. This is called a “lure” or “bait”. Possible ways to make this attractive to the media include the following:

It is a unique campaign; the campaign is historically important; it is highly interesting to the readers/viewers; you have some new information that you want to share with the public; you will talk about an issue that concerns a large number of citizens, etc.

VIEWPOINTS and COMMENTS: Usually represent an analysis of, or a reaction to the news. There are four types of comments:

- > **EDITORIALS** (send your materials to the editors and try also to arrange a meeting to convince them of the importance of your campaign);
- > **LETTERS TO THE EDITOR** (a letter should not be longer than 500 words and it should either review previous news or comment on a campaign that was published in the same newspaper);
- > **OPINIONS AND COMMENTS** (these are essays of guest correspondents and they are not longer than 600-800 words; sometimes the newspaper can order such a text, but you can also prepare a column and send it to the editor);
- > **TALK SHOWS** (in order to get invited to a television or a radio talk show, you have to be known in their circles; before you go to the show, you should see at least one previous episode and find out who the other guests are).

d> **Promotional packets**

For the best presentation of your NGO/LCI/action, it is useful to prepare packages/files/envelopes containing printed materials about your campaign which you can give out to all the media with which your NGO is in contact. The same packages can be given to prospective donors, institutions, government officials, parties and other organizations.

A promotional package can contain:

- :> Short history of your NGO (action, project, etc.)
- :> Factual review of the campaign
- :> Material such as posters, brochures, fliers, booklets and pictures
- :> Important newspaper articles

...but also...

- :> Basic information about the local situation which can be especially useful to the foreign media
- :> Financial reports
- :> List of public persons who support you, and their statements
- :> Schedule of your public appearances and actions
- :> Publications about highlighted topics
- :> Statements and speeches

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:> HADLU — The Croatian Academic Association of Visual Artists (HADLU) from Zadar (Zadar County) received a CroNGO Small Grant to implement the project “Environmental-Visual Art Action WasteArt” in order to raise awareness of the need to care for the environment. In six small communities around Zadar, including the nearby islands, HADLU recruited local people, students and tourists to participate as volunteers in educational actions to collect trash and turn it into works of art. Each action ended with an exhibition of art work created from discarded materials. Over ten newspaper articles assisted HADLU in attracting 200 volunteers to participate in project activities. Media coverage also directly contributed to achievement of the organization’s main objective of raising public awareness of the importance of environmental protection and the need to regulate trash disposal.



:: AFTER COMMUNICATING
WITH THE FREE MEDIA ::



“Media coverage of our activities helps us to spread information about our work to the regions outside Karlovac, to the villages in which we have not been sufficiently known so far. It is also important to point out that when a significant activity happens and is not reported in the media, it seems as if it has not happened at all.”

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Branka Pavić
NGO “Bird of Paradise”
(Udruga “Rajska Ptica”)
Karlovac county, northern
and central Croatia



::: After Communicating with the Free Media :::

a> Media calendar and press clippings

A **media calendar** is a schedule of your NGO/LCI’s public appearances within a certain period of time. All your appearances in the newspapers, radio and television stations, newspaper agencies and Internet websites should be entered into the media calendar.

The media calendar gives you the opportunity to predict most of your appearances, so after giving a statement or holding a press conference, follow the media and enter the subsequent appearances into the calendar. If your NGO/LCI has several branches, it is best to maintain a media calendar for each one of them and to consolidate the information regularly.

example 7.

Media calendar				
MON/May 1	TUE/May 2	WED/May 3	THUE/May 4	FRI/May 5
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HINA, HTnet, Iskon — announcement of the action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Radio Mrak — announcement of the action Radio Mrak — a statement about the action Htnet, Iskon, HINA — information about the beginning of the action National Television (HRT) — story about the action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Večernji list, Slobodna Dalmacija — article on the action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Television (HRT) — “Dobro jutro” — guest on the show

Read the newspapers and Internet portals carefully and collect articles that mention your NGO, a relevant person, a campaign, or an action and file them according to release date. This procedure is called “**press clipping**” and it can be done on a weekly, monthly, yearly or project basis. It is best to keep the original in an archive and to have several copies made so that you can give them to volunteers, business partners or donors. Pay attention to radio stations which often put news and statements on their web sites.

example 8.
Press clipping

Nature and Society, 5 April 2004

Citizens and the Mayor against Cancer

Yesterday, the Clean-Up Association began a three-day action to pick up trash around White Lake in Priobalje that included more than 200 citizens led by Mayor Marko Čvrak.

Support for the action “Cleaning to Health” was provided by all city council members, while the city administration approved 10,000 Kuna in financial assistance and promised 24-hour surveillance of the

illegal dump site after the action.

The goal of the action is to create a pleasant and useful environment around White Lake which, after being cleaned up, will serve as a recreational area for all citizens.

According to an environmental impact study conducted a month ago, scientists have demonstrated that the rate of cancer will increase by thirty

times over the next ten years, as the illegal dump site is polluting underground water that is part of the city’s water supply.

The action “Cleaning to Health” will continue until May 5th and the Association calls on all those interested to come to their office at 2 Keršovanijev Square in Priobalje or call (045) 236 945.

Marko Šimić

Public appearances in electronic media (radio and television) are the most difficult to follow. However, after giving a statement you can ask your colleagues or volunteers to follow one of these media. You can also call the media and ask them when your statement will be broadcast. Similarly, you can ask the electronic media to give you a recording of your statement or a talk show and include it in your NGO's archives.

b> Media report

You can compile a media report of a particular action or project based on the files of all your appearances in the media. The media report is generally sent to your donors after the completion of a project or at the end of a business year.

example 9.

Media report			
Date	medium	form	Cause
May 2	HINA	announcement	Action
	HTnet	announcement	Action
	Iskon	announcement	Action
May 3	Radio Mrak	announcement	Action
	Zeleni radio	note on beginning of the action (4x)	Action
	Radio Mrak	note on beginning of the action (6x)	Action
	HTnet	note on beginning of the action	Action
	Iskon	note on beginning of the action	Action
	HINA	note on beginning of the action	Action
May 4	HRT	story	Action
	Večernji list	article	Action
May 5	Slobodna Dalmacija	article	Action
	HRT	guest on the show "Dobro jutro"	Action



:: DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING A
RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MEDIA ::



“When we recognize local citizen initiatives as groups that respond to the actual needs of communities, it becomes interesting and important for us to cover their work. It is essential to develop cooperation between the media and the LCIs, because we put more effort ourselves in to covering the work of LCIs.”

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Mato Pejić
a reporter of Radio
Daruvar and The
Evening Post
(Večernji list) —
branch office
Daruvar
Bjelovar —
Bilogorje county,
western Slavonia



::: Developing and Maintaining a Relationship with the Media :::

The successful presentation of your activities in the media depends on your relationships with the media and journalists. If your press conference lasts an hour and a half or if you send press statements every day, journalists will in time lose interest in your activities. Therefore, it is very important to build a relationship with the media step by step and to pay special attention to journalists. In addition, try to contact the journalists who cover your field of work and brief them about your work at least once a month. Press briefings enable you to present your activities but also to chat about the problems in your department in a more relaxed atmosphere.

a> How to respond to calls from the media

Sometimes, news about your activities is not as interesting as that of different catastrophes and crises. News about your NGO/LCI is also in competition with the news of other similar organizations. If a reporter calls you for information for his/her story, respond as soon as possible.

If they quote you incorrectly or take your words out of context, it is usually best to learn the lesson and move on. Do not write agitated letters to the editor. Better yet, have your media coordinator call the journalist and clear the misunderstanding or ask them to correct the quote or the facts, but do not do this in an aggressive way. You cannot win a verbal war with the media.

If you are generally not satisfied with the space the media gives you, consider meeting with the chief editor or column editors. The meeting will give you a chance to present the work of your NGO and to identify the problem. In any case, it is worth trying, because the process of teaching the media about the role of NGOs in society is still ongoing.

If you are involved in specific issues and have established relationships with the media, be prepared

for journalists to call you often for answers or your expert opinion. For example, if a local environmental NGO does not know where the city dump is, or if a women's NGO does not have information about the number of women councilors in a city council, it lacks seriousness and can ruin the reputation of your NGO/LCI.

b> Rules of conduct with journalists

- Never lie to a journalist; always speak the truth.
- Accept journalists' calls, be available and respect their deadlines.
- Do your homework: you should have a draft of your speech and supporting arguments every time you talk to a journalist.
- Always speak openly and officially, do not say anything "off the record" or talk about a "general condition", unless your NGO/LCI intends to use it that way.
- Never call journalists when you are angry. Stay calm and composed during interviews.
- Never say: "No comment"; instead, you can say: "I am not ready to answer your question at the moment, let me check the information and call you back".
- Give an answer to every question, but try to relate it to your message, do not accept the definitions and formulations given by the reporters and feel free to rephrase the question.
- Do not take a journalist's ignorance as a personal insult.
- Keep in mind that your audience is diverse, therefore, speak in clear, simple language and avoid using jargon or dialect.
- Be fair to all journalists — do not give preference to your friends or supporters.
- Be informed about the newspaper and television news and programs.
- Arrive on time to meetings with journalists.
- When you call the media, ask if the time is appropriate (learn from journalists about "life of the editorial office"). The easiest way to reach the editor is to call him/her between 10:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m. and journalists before 10:00 a.m. (before they head out for their fieldwork) and around 2:00 p.m. when they write and submit their texts.

c> What if journalists want to make up news when there is none?

Sometimes you may get the impression that journalists do not understand your work at all. For example, you organize a press conference and only four journalists attend and the next week, when there are not any activities, they keep calling you to comment on irrelevant events that do not have anything whatsoever to do with your work. This may happen for several reasons: first, on the day of your press conference there may have been too much news. Second, the reporter has the wrong perception of the field of work of your NGO/LCI. Third, if the journalists cannot reach the competent persons, they will try to get a statement from any person available. Try to explain the position and the work of your NGO to journalists and ask them to visit you. Do not patronize or lecture them in a teacher-student manner. It is good to use the attention of the media to get them to cover the things you want and to promote your work and success.

Example:

A reporter asks: "How do you comment on the plans to build a dump site in Donji Sobočani?" Your possible response: "It is really necessary to build a dump site in our region. Choosing the location without consulting the residents is not acceptable. However, the NGO Purgatory (Čistilište) appeals to the authorities to solve this problem as soon as possible. Specifically, last week we started an action to clean the White Pond (Bijelo jezero) which was covered with garbage that irresponsible individuals had been dumping there for years. As a result of this effort, the city government organized guards to prevent the further dumping of garbage. We believe that the citizens will take better care of their environment and use the garbage cans or containers."

d> What if we do everything right and journalists are just not interested in our work?

If you really paid enough attention to the media and they still did not cover the work of your



NGO/LCI, it is time to consider alternative ways of dealing with the news blackout. It is up to you to find ways to reach the public. For example, you can consider involving volunteers in:

- organizing calls to radio and television shows and having them put questions to local government authorities or journalists themselves on behalf of your NGO/LCI
- sending letters to local institutions about a certain problem
- organizing information desks and distributing fliers in order to inform citizens about your activities
- organizing a humanitarian action such as donating blood as these actions are often covered in the media
- creating a simple newsletter for your NGO that can be financed by local sponsors such as photocopy shops

e> How to get free media coverage

Paid media space can include: an article in a publication, a broadcast, advertisement, audio spot, video spot and a prepared message read on the air. Since campaign budgets are generally limited and cover only basic activities of the NGO/LCI, you can ask the media to help you by giving a discount or by broadcasting your statements for free. Of course, the media will not be delighted with that idea at first, but it is up to you to prove that you work for the benefit of the entire community and that you also offer information on topics that they sometimes lack.

Recently there have been some positive changes in this area of working with the media as media begin to recognize the important role of NGOs in society. The media has become ready to offer considerable discounts for actions of public significance. They are also more open to cooperation with and assistance to NGOs, but the way they treat this idea depends on your relationship with them.

Sometimes it is necessary to use your imagination in order to get free media coverage. For example, to get a free radio show, you can try to bring a member of the Croatian parliament, a minister or a celebrity with a positive public image to the show. In order to get free media time for audio or video

spots you can inform the media of your limited financial resources and the fact that you are working for the public benefit. You can also mention that the media will be presented as a donor. Everything that you have to pay for you can also get for free, it is up to you to ask and be persistent.

Similarly, local governments or local entrepreneurs can also help you and financially support your media campaign.

When choosing forms of **paid advertising** pay attention to the following:

- :> When making audio spots — the size of a region covered — choose the radio stations with large audiences and with listeners that make up your target group; the duration of the spots, especially if you arranged to get them for free; the clarity of the spots and the quantity of information.
- :> When making video spots — the duration of the spots, especially if you arranged to get them for free; the clarity of the spots and the quantity of information; visual identification of your NGO/LCI in the spot — make sure that your logo and phone numbers appear in the spot.
- :> When making posters — the space available for putting up posters so that you will not be fined; the size and weight of a poster if you engage volunteers; supplying volunteers with adhesive materials if you do not have money to pay for putting up posters.
- :> When making brochures and fliers — the amount of text and the paper weight — if you want your brochure to last longer, choose thicker paper; the manner and location of distribution; the realistic number of brochures/fliers so that you will not have to throw the surplus away.

:> **MEDUN** — The “Medun” Bee-keepers’ Association has been actively promoting honey production as an important economic activity for local rural development in Delnice (Primorsko-goranska County) for over 30 years. In September 2003 the NGO received support from CroNGO to organize a bee-keeping exhibition to present its latest achievements and to promote bee-keeping as an additional source of income for local people. In order to gain citizen support for the exhibition, “Medun” used the local radio station to invite people to actively participate in the exhibition by contributing their old bee-keeping equipment, photographs and other items associated with bee-keeping and honey production. The radio announcement proved to be very effective, and citizens soon began to call the NGO on a daily basis to ask how they could become involved in the project. As a result of the NGO’s broad approach to the entire community through the radio, a large number of people participated in the organization of the exhibition.



:: CONCLUSION ::



“Cooperation with the media is important because in that way the work of an NGO/LCI becomes transparent and public. Presentation in the media gives us a chance to influence the important events in our local community.”

Palma Miličević
NGO IKS
Sisak-Moslavina County,
Central and North
Croatia

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:: Conclusion ::

Every start is difficult, and so is the beginning of work with the media. However, the quality of your work with the media is directly related to the level of media coverage of your activities. The results of work with the media often become visible only after several months or a year of continuous work. It is important not to give up after your first try or after only a few months. Just as NGOs/LCIs need time to learn, adapt and perfect their work with the media, journalists and the media need time to get to know the work of an NGO and present their work to the public in the right way.

NGO/LCI activists do not have to be media experts, as everybody can learn to work with the media. It is important that NGOs/LCIs continuously maintain contact with the media. This will result in the media beginning to accept you as a vital interlocutor and systematically following your activities.

Although a number of examples on work with the media are provided in this handbook, it is up to NGOs/LCIs themselves to increase the quality of their work with the media or to create an entire media strategy so that their work is recognized by the wider public and citizens. Remember to be creative, and we hope that this handbook helps you in your work.

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::: NOTES :::

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