

Be Better Field Guide Earned Media Outreach Tips*

What is Earned Media Relations?

Earned Media Relations is a strategy within public relations that builds relationships between organizations and the media to inform the public about an organization's mission, policies, and practices in a positive, consistent, and credible manner.

Unlike advertising which is paid for, earned media is not purchased but is obtained by pitching (i.e., making a case for, or "selling") newsworthy story ideas to media outlets. If the media outlet chooses to turn the idea into a news story, it can be said that the story was "earned" through pitching.

Why Does Earned Media News Coverage Matter?

News coverage matters because news motivates change, attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes.

News helps shape both individual and community concerns about what is worthy of public attention. Additionally, the news media can choose, create, sustain, and shape an issue for public consumption by influencing how issues are presented or framed for consideration by the public and decision makers.

Combined with other types of public health interventions, earned media coverage truly can create change.

What is Considered News?

News can include new trends, ideas or inspirations appropriate to your community and can also be defined as any of the following:

- **New information the public needs to know** – for example, if people in your community have helped to make changes, such as improving the types of food offered in children's meals, or helping to light outdoor walking paths to make it safer to walk outdoors.

- **A new angle, development, or perspective on an ongoing story** – for example, adding a new feature, or emphasizing an existing one, that is part of an annual event, such as featuring "riding the Smoothie Bike" at the annual Fruit and Veggie Fest event to excite reporters about that experience/visual so they cover the event.
- **A new product, service, or opportunity** – for example, launching a community garden to educate community members about starting home gardens to grow their own fruits and vegetables.

Earned Media Outreach Strategy Checklist

According to Benjamin Franklin, "Failing to plan is planning to fail." That is especially true as it pertains to conducting earned media relations. It is important to create an earned media outreach plan to guide you. When doing so, consider the following:

☐ Determine Your Goal

Why do you want to get your news out? Do you want to encourage people to attend an event, or do you want people to learn new information that could help them live healthier lives? Knowing what your goal is helps you to further determine your earned media strategy.

☐ Audience

Who do you want to receive your news? Consider where audience members are located, their demographic information, primary language spoken, and which medium works best for that audience (i.e., how they get their news). They could receive news online through blogs and social media, through television or radio, or via newspapers and magazines.

□ Pitching Your Story

Determine if the news you want to release is newsworthy. Does it fit into any of the following:

- Is it new information?
- A new angle or perspective on an ongoing story?
- A new development?
- A new product, service or opportunity?
- A new trend or idea?

If the news you want to release doesn't fit any of the above criteria, you will either want to consider ways to adapt the story to make it more newsworthy on its own, or develop angles to make it more interesting for the media to cover. Or you might consider rethinking whether this news is most appropriate for earned media coverage, or if it might be better suited in a different medium (such as social media).

□ Decide Which Type(s) of Earned Media is Most Appropriate to Pitch:

Does the story you want to pitch include visual elements such as people attending an event with things like food demonstrations, physical activity demonstrations, etc.? If so, it might be better geared toward television media which tells stories by strongly relying on visual elements. However you can also pitch highly visual stories to print media as well.

If the story doesn't include many visual elements, it will be better suited for print media coverage, and you should exclude pitching to television media outlets.

□ Consider Who Your Spokespeople Will Be:

Before you pitch a story to earned media outlets, you will need to determine who will be interviewed if the media decides to cover your story. Prepare your spokesperson by using template earned media messages that correspond with the story you are pitching and the points you want to convey.

To prepare for the interview, it is also a good idea to practice asking the spokesperson questions the reporter might ask so he/she feels comfortable with the messages during an interview.

□ Media Pitching Timeline:

When planning your earned media outreach, use the guidelines that are in the Event and Media Planning Guide. Also be sure to factor in time for approvals of earned media materials.

It is most effective to add these timeline dates to your calendar to ensure they are implemented in a timely manner.

Developing a Media List

An integral part of earned media outreach is to have a targeted, current media list in place. When creating a media list, consider the following:

- As previously mentioned, it is important to target the most appropriate type(s) of media.
 - Print – newspapers and magazines
 - Broadcast – television and radio
- Decide which audiences you want to target and choose media outlets that are specific to these audiences.
 - General
 - Ethnic
 - Specifically geared toward industry and/or interest
- Determine the type of editor and/or reporter to target
 - Current Contacts

Determine if anyone within your organization currently has contacts with local media outlets and if so, how they could potentially be utilized (if appropriate) for the upcoming earned media pitching assignment.

- Print Media Outlets

City Editor – The city editor decides which news should be covered for the main section of the print media outlet.

Section Editor – If there is a specific section of the print media outlet that is geared toward your goal (such as health, business, lifestyle, etc.), you should target the section editor instead.

Specific Reporters – Research reporters online to determine what types of stories he/she has written about most frequently and add them to your media list if they closely align with your earned media goals.

- Broadcast Media Outlets

Planning Editor – If the broadcast media outlet has a planning editor, add this person to your list as they help the news team plan stories for future coverage.

Assignment Editor – Most broadcast media outlets have assignment editors who are key influencers in deciding which news will be covered.

Specific Reporters – As with print media outlets, research reporters online to determine which types of stories he/she has covered most frequently and add them to your media list if they closely align with your earned media goals.

- When compiling information for media lists, be sure to include the following categories:

- Media Outlet's:

- Name
- Newsroom email address (if available)
- Newsroom/Assignment Desk phone number

- Editor/Reporter's:

- First and Last Name
- Title
- Email address
- Phone number

How to Use Template Earned Media Materials

A complete set of template earned media materials have been included in the Field Guide that are related to the current media campaign in English and in Spanish. These template materials, along with tips about how to use them, include:

Pitch Letter

- Be sure to position your pitch letter to tell the story you would like to see covered in a way that will appeal to editors' and/or reporters' coverage needs and the interests of their readers/viewers/listeners.
- Pitch letters are usually emailed to earned media outlets in the body copy of the email (not as attachments as many media outlets will not open attachments).

Calendar Advisory

- If an event or program is open to the public, use the calendar advisory to email to earned media outlets for posting so the public can learn about it.
- Cut and paste the calendar advisory into the body copy of your email under the pitch letter. Do not send as an attachment.

Media Advisory

- This is a brief overview which includes the: who, what, when, where, and why about the event or program you would like the media outlets to cover. Along with your pitch letter, send this to editors/reporters to obtain their interest in covering your program.
- Cut and paste the media advisory into the body of your email under the pitch letter. Do not send as an attachment.

Press Release

- The press release is a more detailed narrative about the event/program. Unlike the media or calendar advisories, the press release typically includes a quote from the program's spokesperson.
- Typically a press release is given to an editor/reporter when they cover the event/program so they have more details at hand when writing their stories. It also can be emailed to earned media outlets following the event/program with the hope that the media outlet will use the information in their publication.
- When emailing the press release, cut and paste it into the body of your email under the pitch letter. Do not send as an attachment.

Message Points

- These can be used by spokespeople to prepare for upcoming interviews. They can also be used to create additional documents that might not be part of the template media materials package.

If you have questions, or would like assistance with implementing earned media relations, please contact the CDPH Media and Public Relations Section at NEOPB.MediaPR@cdph.ca.gov.