

# How to approach the traditional news media

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Do you have a compelling personal story that you feel others would be interested in hearing or reading about? If you choose to tell your story to a news outlet, the following guidelines will help you work with newspaper, radio and television reporters.

This information is provided as a resource to TCDD Council members. Before contacting a reporter, please coordinate with staff members.

## Do your homework

Know the answers to the following questions before you contact a reporter:

- Why should the reporter and their audience be interested in my story? Why should they care? How does it affect them?
- Do I just want people to know my story or do I want people to be motivated to do something? What action do I want them to take?

## Think like a reporter

The media's primary concern is what's newsworthy. Reporters look for stories that

- are timely;
- have a local angle; and
- appeal to the majority of their audience.

Generally speaking, reporters are not subject matter experts. They work on tight deadlines and produce numerous stories about a variety of topics. It's your job to help them understand the issue and why it's important.

## Have an angle for your pitch

Know your goals and have an angle when pitching your story to a reporter. Your angle just might determine what kind of news coverage you receive (if any).

**Example:** Your garden is overflowing with tomatoes and you want people to buy them. A reporter and his audience will probably not care that you have a green thumb.

**Your pitch:** Despite the severe Texas drought, I have been able to grow an abundance of tomatoes in my garden by doing XYZ. By doing XYZ, people's gardens can thrive without frequent watering. I will teach anyone who buys \$10 worth of my tomatoes how to implement XYZ in their gardens.

## Decide whom to contact

Now that you know your angle, do some research to help you decide whom to contact and how. Your story may be best suited for only one type of news outlet, or for only a handful of reporters. You have a better chance of getting media coverage if you have a customized approach.

What type of outlet is most appropriate for your story: newspaper, radio or TV? Or a combination?

- **Newspapers** run news stories, feature stories with a news angle or human interest twist, and timely or controversial editorials.
- **Radio stations** want short news items, public service announcements (PSAs) and topics for talk shows.
- **Television stations** want brief stories with a visual interest.

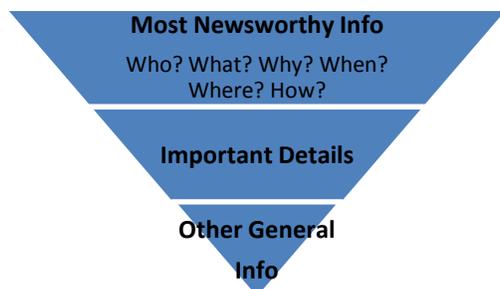
After deciding your news outlet, determine whom to contact. Is there a reporter who regularly covers disability issues or other topics related to your story (health, education, etc)? If not, reach out to an editor or news director.

## Make your pitch

Most journalists accept and prefer email communication. Their addresses are often found attached to their newspaper articles or on their outlet's website. If your first contact is by phone, however, be prepared to follow up in writing.

A typical pitch letter is concise and must contain six basic elements: who, what, when, where, why and how. Include your name, contact information and the date.

Write with an inverted pyramid style: include the most important information in the lead paragraph, with the facts decreasing in importance as you go down the page. Editors have a limited amount of space to fill and if your story is too long, they will start cutting from the bottom.



Note: If you would like to submit a Letter to the Editor or Guest Editorial to a newspaper, read *Working with the News Media* in the Resources section of the TCDD website. It explains the difference in the two approaches and gives tips on how to get your letter printed.

## What to do next

You sent the information. Now what? A phone call to confirm that the reporter received the information and ask if they have any questions is appropriate. Don't get discouraged if the media outlets don't like your story idea. Learn the types of stories reporters are interested in by studying what is used. Look for something that is new or different about a subject to entice the media to cover it. Recognize that other stories can bump yours, even after it is finished. Reporters work for editors and news directors. Their stories can be changed by several layers of staff. Be persistent, but not a nuisance. Strive to develop a working relationship with the media to get ongoing coverage of disability issues.