

Dropout Prevention Summit Media Outreach Tips

Media coverage is one of the most effective means of raising awareness for an event or issue. It helps build community interest in your work and support for its success – and encourages others to become involved and follow your progress. To this end, broad dissemination of your event advisory is an important first step. Here are a few tips to help you get started:

Step 1: Building a Media List

To build an effective media list, you will want to first identify the media outlets and reporters that typically cover education at the state and city level. To do this, you might scan your local newspapers for the most recent education stories and set up a Google Alert online that will search for news stories based on specific keywords and deliver a summary via email.

Think about whether there are other reporters you know or have worked with in the past who should be added. You'll also want to think beyond the traditional education beat. Are there columnists or other reporters who write about community, family/parenting or education issues? Business reporters who may be interested in the story from the perspective of young people who are not ready for the workforce? Radio or television journalists who have covered your organization or this issue in the past?

For each of these contacts, you will need the name, phone number and email address.

Step 2. Completing Your Template Media Advisory

To gain media attention about this event and this issue in your community, a media advisory has been developed that can be customized for your particular event. We have also prepared core messages for the Dropout Prevention Summits, which you can use to explain the program to reporters. Both of these documents are located on the America's Promise Alliance website.

Step 3. Distributing Your Advisory

For easiest distribution, we recommend that you copy the advisory into the text of an email and send it out 3-4 days in advance of the event. One exception is that we do not recommend distributing an advisory on a Friday or weekend. It's wiser to distribute the advisory 5-6 days in an advance rather than have it get lost in a flurry of weekend emails.

Step 4. Following Up with Reporters

Place a follow-up call to the reporters the day after you send the event advisory. Late morning, around 10:30 or 11:00 a.m. is often a good time to call reporters. They have already had their daily planning meetings and it is before they get deeply involved in other stories.

Reporters do not have a lot of time to talk on the phone. You will have only a few minutes to get their attention and capture their interest immediately. Make certain your pitch contains the who, what, where, when and why. Do not call simply to ask if they received your email. Offer to send the advisory again if the reporter has not received it.

Pitching Tips:

- If the reporter you call is not interested or on another beat, ask whom he/she recommends you speak with instead.

- If you are pitching more than one reporter at a news outlet, let them know.

- If you get voicemail, do not leave a message until you have tried to contact the reporter several times. If you must leave a message, leave the basic information and call back.

Step 5: Reminding Reporters of the Event

You'll want to send the advisory out again via email on the day before the event. The second time you send out the advisory, you will want to change the subject line of the email to include the word "tomorrow" to give the email some urgency for the reporter receiving it. The advisory should come from the person who is in charge of the summit for your organization.

Step 6: Track Your Calls and Collect Clips

We encourage you to track your follow-up calls. Some reporters may not cover this announcement now, but will be interested in future developments. Others will ask you about other stories they are covering. Capturing this information is useful for being responsive to them in the future, which leads to long-term relationships.

You will also want to collect clips of any coverage that appears for your own records, as well as to send to America's Promise Alliance, so that all are aware of your local successes.