



## Community Voice

Getting your message out

## Working with the Media

*The media can be great allies when it comes to **getting your message out**. Whether you want to convey straightforward information, ensure that both sides of a story are heard, or provide leadership in times of crisis, the media can help school boards reach their communities. By developing a positive relationship with the media, you will have greater access to the powerful tools of print, TV, and radio. A strong relationship with your local media will do more than help you convey specific information, though. It will also position your school board as a reliable and trusted educational leader, which will in turn enhance your reputation in the community. But a relationship with the media is no different than any other relationship: it requires hard work to make it strong.*

Have you ever heard the saying “never pick a fight with people who buy ink by the barrel?” While the media may not be nearly as dependent on ink these days, the underlying message still applies. When it comes to dealing with the media, there tends to be a power imbalance—and it doesn’t favour school boards. So while you might manage your media relations, you can’t manage the media. But there are things you can do to improve the odds of positive outcomes from your media interactions.

**One:** Plan for a media request. Identify a spokesperson or persons. Make sure they are media-savvy, even if that means investing some time and money in formal training. And don’t forget that the media work 24/7, which means that you should have a spokesperson available beyond the standard 9-to-5 work day.

**Two:** Make it easy for the media. Reporters are under a time crunch, so if you want to increase the odds of having your story told, help them! Provide quotes, background information,

photos—anything that will increase the appeal to the media of telling **your** story. But remember: just because you want a story told doesn’t necessarily make it newsworthy. If you throw out a hook and you don’t get any bites, accept that outcome. Railing against the media will not get your story published!

**Three:** Tell your story. Have your key messages ready, and focus on those messages. Gather your thoughts before you speak, and don’t worry about filling dead air. The media has come to you because they think you have something to say, but if you don’t answer that email or phone call, someone else will, and that someone may have a different story to tell. At the same time, you aren’t obligated to respond to every media request. Take responsibility for what is under your authority and leave the rest to someone else. While you never want to use the words “no comment,” sometimes, that really should be the gist of your response.

**Four:** Media relations in a time of crisis pose some special challenges. There’s a good chance that the reporter already has some information, either through another interview or via social media. Ask questions. Find out what they already know—or think they know—and be prepared to dispel rumours. If the story is a developing one, your job isn’t done after the first interview or comment. Make sure the reporter can reach you with further questions, or follow up yourself. If it involves your students or schools, try to position yourself as the authority on the story, and stay accessible. There is one common, underlying theme of your crisis messaging: we care, we are capable, and we are in control.