

Guide to Effective Media Relations

INTRODUCTION: THE REALITY OF TODAY'S MEDIA

For groups and organizations, the media are a channel to get their messages out to the public. These messages may originate with the organizations, but the control over how they are spread lies strictly with the media. Given this role, the media must remain impartial toward organizations and the events they are covering. The role of journalists is to distribute information and report on real facts, all while respecting tight deadlines and strict formatting requirements.

The media do not have enough room to include all the news that is happening in the world, or even just in Quebec. Announcements from groups and organizations must therefore compete with other events for their attention.

The media value of an announcement is shaped by several factors. The **four key elements** that determine whether a particular piece of news will be covered in the media are:

- Degree of freshness/novelty
- Meaning and connection with the target audience
- Public interest
- Dramatic or sensational nature of the announcement

Journalists have a limited amount of space for every report.

- Radio report: less than 250 words
- TV report: 250 words
- TV sound bite: 10 seconds
- Newspaper article: generally between 500 and 1,000 words
- Magazine article: generally less than 2,500 words

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and the municipal electoral context, pressure on newsrooms is greater than ever (reduced staff, fewer advertisers, less space for news). Please keep this in mind and manage your expectations accordingly.

MEDIA RELATIONS PROCEDURES

A. Before you begin: Documentation

Start by making sure you have all the documentation you need to explain what Early Childhood Week is, including the documents that will be sent to the media:

- Key messages (for your use only)
- Press release
- Early Childhood Week logo

These documents will be provided to you. Please adapt the press release with information on your own activities and other details specific to your organization.

We suggest you have pictures on hand that capture the nature of your activities to share with the media if asked.

Given that much of the information will be on the Early Childhood Week website, we recommend that you familiarize yourself with the platform before interacting with the media. That way, you will be able to guide journalists as required.

B. Before you begin: Press list

The press list is a list of the media you wish to reach out to when issuing a press release or an invitation. Preparing this list is an important task. Any mistakes in the content can have a significant impact on the desired outcomes.

There are many types of media, all of which treat information in a very different way. You will be responsible for relations with local media outlets (weekly newspapers, local radio/TV, local websites). The head of press relations for the Collectif petite enfance will oversee relations with provincial/national media (major daily newspapers, magazines, news agencies, national radio/TV) and regional media such as the regional stations of prominent electronic media outlets (TV/radio) and major regional dailies (*La Tribune, Le Nouvelliste, Le Droit, Le Journal de Québec, Le Soleil, Le Quotidien* and *La Voix de l'Est*). Here are the steps you should take to build your press list.

1. Identify target media

We recommend starting by building a list of the media in your area that may be interested in your news. Some Internet research, either through Google or sites like <http://www.fpjq.org/repertoires/repertoire-des-medias> will help you find this information.

2. Identify target contacts

Once you have a list of your target media, you can go to their websites to obtain the contact information of the people you wish to connect with. You can also call and ask to talk to the editorial assistant or assignment editor to find out who would be the best suited to cover your story. Most media representatives are happy to answer your questions and provide you with the information you are looking for.

For clarity's sake, here is an overview of what the various media representatives do.

- News manager, assignment editor, editor-in-chief: These are the people who decide which news items will be reported on and assign the various journalists to cover them. It is very important that these “gatekeepers” receive news directly. They work in the news rooms of newspapers and radio/TV stations.
- Reporter (general news or specialized topics): You can also reach out to individual reporters (in addition to the assignment editor), especially if you already have a connection or, based on your research, see they have an affinity for stories like yours.
- Columnist: These journalists write from a subjective point of view. Unless you are sure that they will put a positive spin on your news, it is best not to engage them directly.
- Researcher: For electronic media (radio/TV), this is often the best person to contact. Researchers are often the ones who explore potential topics to be covered or people to talk to. They also are in charge of coordinating interviews.

C. Approaching the Media

1. Sending information by email

The initial contact with a journalist is generally established by sending a personalized email along with a press release. Start by adapting the pitch and press release we sent you. We recommend including the press release in the body of your email, above your email signature. There is a better chance that it will be read that way, since it doesn't involve opening an attachment. Remember to include the Early Childhood Week logo in your email.

We recommend personalizing each of your emails, but if you do send out your message to multiple recipients, use the “bcc” email function to protect people's confidentiality and avoid revealing the names on your press list.

2. Preparing a call script

Before making your follow-up calls, prepare a short list of talking points (1 to 2 minutes) that you want to cover on the phone. Make sure to have all of the information about Early Childhood Week close at hand, in particular your key messages. Remember: media representatives are constantly barraged with requests from multiple sources, so be assertive and get straight to the point!

3. Making follow-up calls

After sending your email, it is important to make a follow-up call within a reasonable timeframe, ideally the same day or:

1. Weekly newspaper: within a week of sending the email
 1. Assignment editor or editor-in-chief
 2. Reporter

2. Radio/TV: within three days of sending the email
 1. Assignment editor or news room manager
 2. Researcher
 3. Host

Since media contacts tend to change quite frequently, we suggest asking for the person you would like to talk to by title (e.g., the assignment editor), rather than by name.

The purpose of the follow-up call is to check whether your contact needs additional information and to answer any questions they may have.

If the person you are calling is not available, leave a message and try back later that day or the next. Never leave more than one message. Note that mornings are generally the best time of the day to contact the media.

4. Managing media enquiries

If a reporter asks to interview you, make sure you clearly identify the angle they wish to take.

Here are a few questions to ask **before agreeing to an interview**:

- What is the focus of your report?
- What key topic is your report linked to?
- Will this be part of a series?
- What “point of view” are you looking to express?
- Does this tie in with other ideas, trends, speculations, etc.?

Based on their answers, you can identify the most suitable person for the interview.

For interview requests, here are few questions to ask the reporter:

- Who will conduct the interview?
- Who else are you interviewing?
- Will the interview be done individually or as part of a panel?
- What will the format of the interview be?
- Will the interview be pre-recorded or go out live?
- How long with the interview last?
- Do you want the interviewee to call you? If so, what is the number to call?

- Is this an “in-depth” interview?
- What is your deadline?
- When will the interview be aired or published?

It is important to answer reporters’ questions promptly and provide the required information (e.g., pictures from past events) as quickly as possible. Just be careful to have the proper authorization to use these materials (copyright and parental consent if there are children involved).

OP-EDS

In an effort to raise public awareness about Early Childhood Week and urge people to do their part for the cause, we strongly encourage you to write an op-ed. Most print media have a space for readers’ letters. Find out what your regional newspapers offer in terms of an “opinion,” “debate” or “reader mail” section. An email address is usually provided.

A sample letter is available in your media relations kit. Use it as inspiration and adapt it as appropriate to express the realities specific to your context.

MEDIA COVERAGE AND PRESS REVIEW

It is very important to regularly monitor the paper and digital editions of your local newspapers to keep track of the media coverage you receive. Gather as many articles as you can, scan them or save them in a PDF file. Make sure the name of the file includes the source and the date.

For radio and TV coverage, make sure to ask when an interview and/or mention is expected to air. Keep up-to-date notes of this information in your press list.

All this will help you build a list of the print, radio and TV coverage you receive. Make sure the list includes the name of the source, the air/publishing date, whether or not an interview was given and any other information you find useful (a post-coverage checklist is included with this guide).

Please send a copy of the completed checklist, along with all of the articles and reports compiled in your press review, to info@collectifpetiteenfance.com by December 6, 2020. This information is very important to the event organizers. It is an essential tool in assessing the outcomes of our communications efforts. Please do not forget this step!

OTHER ENQUIRES

If you have any questions or concerns about your media relations, do not hesitate to contact:

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