

USING NEWS MEDIA

News media is the biggest influence on our members, public officials and the general public when it comes to politics. It is also one of the most significant opportunities we have to raise our visibility and add power to mobilization.

With some nuts-and-bolts work, every District Council and Local Union has the ability and opportunity to build support for members through the news media.

Here are some overall do's and don'ts:

DO:

1. Do take advantage of natural opportunities—don't underestimate a rally or union endorsement as potential for positive news coverage.
2. Do have rank-and-file members join leaders in public efforts.
3. Do talk about values—fairness, hard work, families and democracy.

DON'T:

1. Don't use insider jargon. Use the talking points in your LIUNA Builds America kit to help talk about issues, such as the Davis-Bacon Act in a way that everyone understands.
2. Don't expect coverage every time—but over time, reporters will grow more accustomed to working with you.
3. Never lie to a news reporter—if something should not be made public, it's better to say nothing.

Off the Record? Unless you have a trusted relationship with a journalist, assume nothing is off the record. Even then, journalists will consider a conversation “on the record” and for use unless it is clear from the beginning of the conversation that what you say is “off the record” and not for use. Be clear about the ground rules before you talk.

A Calendar to Get News Media Coverage of Your Event

DO IT NOW Notice who writes articles on issues important to members—jobs, construction, the economy, continuing education, stories about where members work or any other issues in which LIUNA makes a difference. Make a list of those reporters with their contact information.

Strategic Communications can provide you with a reporter list and contacts for your area, as well as other media assistance.

Make a brief introductory phone call about what kind of information you commonly have, followed by a 15-minute get-to-know-you talk over coffee. Then, when you have something you think is newsworthy, you'll know who to contact, and they'll know you.

DO IT 10 DAYS IN ADVANCE OF YOUR EVENT

- Line up spokespeople and potential resources for reporters to interview. It might be yourself, as well as a rank-and-file member whom you've prepared and an ally outside the union who supports the union's position.
- Begin thinking about how the event is newsworthy—if it's a rally, march, phone-banking or other type of activism, there is likely to be a reporter who is interested in the event, or the issues behind it.

DO IT 5 DAYS IN ADVANCE

- Determine the best message. What would the headline be if you wrote it? How would a TV news anchor describe it?
- From your perfect message, draft talking points—the headline you'd like, and the key facts and statements that support it.
- Determine who delivers each part of your message. Practice, and help other participants practice.
- Draft a news advisory—a paragraph or so with the “who, what, when and where” and a contact name and number reporters can reach at any time. See the sample News Media Advisory Template.

DO IT 4 DAYS IN ADVANCE

- Prepare background information for reporters—fact sheets, bios of workers and leaders who will participate, a Q&A—the more you repeat your message in different ways and put it in reporters' hands, the more likely it will become a part of their reports.

DO IT 3 DAYS IN ADVANCE

- Confirm participants.
- Review your message

DO IT 2 DAYS IN ADVANCE

- Distribute the news advisory by email and fax to your list of reporters.
- Call each reporter to confirm they received the advisory.

DO IT THE DAY BEFORE

- Fax and email the news advisory again.
- Call each reporter to determine if they will be attending or reporting on your news.
- Prepare a news release to distribute the day of your news. See the sample News Release Template.

DO IT THE MORNING OF

- Call TV assignment desks and radio news directors before 8 a.m. and ask if they're covering your news.
- Fax and email advisory one last time.

FOLLOW-UP

- Distribute your news release to those who attend your event; fax and email it to reporters who are not there.

The single most important indicator of whether news media covers an event is whether they receive turnout calls—not just

News Media Advisory Template

NEWS ADVISORY FOR [fill in date]

Contact: [fill in contact name and number where contact can always be immediately reached]

[Main Headline—e.g., Presidential Candidate to Meet With Workers Struggling for the American Dream]

[One sentence on what is going to happen—e.g., Presidential candidate Joe Smith will meet with workers who are struggling for a living wage during a visit to Anytown on Thursday, February 22.]

WHAT: [repeat what will happen]
WHEN: [insert time, day and date]
WHERE [insert exact location]

[Insert a small amount of background—but don't provide so much that a reporter wouldn't have to attend the event to get the news.]

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Sample News Release Template

For information: [fill in contact name and number where contact can always be immediately reached]

[Main headline—e.g, Union of Workers Who Build America Says to New Congress: “Listen to Those Who Elected You”]

[Sub-headline—e.g., LIUNA Asks Legislators to Fight for Strong Pensions, Health Care, the Freedom to Join a Union and Comprehensive Immigration Reform]

[Insert body of release. This is how you would want the story to be published if you could write it.]

Example:

Washington, DC (January 4, 2007)—The Laborers’ International Union—the fastest growing and most progressive construction and public service union in North America—on Thursday welcomed newly arriving members of Congress and called on them to join the fight on issues that matter most to working people.

“Millions of construction laborers—who work hard every day to build this country—helped elect the new Congress,” Laborers’ Union General President Terry O’Sullivan said. “The first 100 hours of Congress will set a tone, but the next two years will show how much Congress has changed. We say, ‘Listen to those who elected you.’ ”

Members of the Laborers’ Union have embarked on an aggressive political and legislative program. Last fall, thousands of rank-and-file members volunteered to elect pro-worker candidates.

The effort continues with an internal issues education effort for both members and policy-makers. On Thursday, the union welcomed the new Congressional leadership with a full page ad in Roll Call calling for Congress to fight together with working people for:

- Retirement security
- Good jobs
- Accessible health care
- Strong enforcement of family-supporting laws such as Davis-Bacon
- The freedom to join a union
- Comprehensive immigration reform

LIUNA represents the men and women who go to work every day building America through construction and public service.

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How to Write and Submit a Letter to the Editor

Letters to the editor are a way for anyone to be published in a newspaper or magazine. You can use a letter to the editor to express an opinion about a current event, or to praise or criticize news coverage.

A letter to the editor should be very short—less than 200 words—and should say which article the letter is in response to. The letter should state the subject and the writer's opinion, and must include the writer's name, address and a contact phone number. Don't forget to sign your letter and to mention your Local Union membership.

Sample Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

Your newspaper reported that our union donated \$5,000 to the Joe Smith for Governor Campaign—and that's true. But there's more to it. Members of LIUNA Local A voted not just to contribute to Smith's campaign and endorse him; members voted to commit to being foot soldiers to elect him. That's because he is fighting for what our members and all working people are fighting for: more jobs and better jobs, health care we can afford, corporate accountability and a voice for those of us who are hard at work every day building America.

Sincerely,

John Adams, President, LIUNA Local A

If you want help in getting letters to the editor to the right person, contact Strategic Communications.

How to Blog

Blogs, short for “weblogs,” are websites where individuals or groups of individuals discuss recent news. The popularity of blogs has exploded in recent years—and some have become widely monitored sources of news.

Blogging is easy, free and democratic. If you have something to say, you will be published. If properly targeted, you can make known the issues that are important to our union.

Blogging requires Internet access, an email address and a commitment to be heard.

1. Visit websites that have blogs and register with the site.
2. Comment when and where you see fit. Be funny, be informative, be opinionated, be personal, but be appropriate. Remember that you are a representative of LIUNA in these online communities.
3. Political activists, candidates and reporters look to LIUNA for our opinions and perspectives. By identifying yourself as a member and talking about your life and your work in communities, people will look to your comments for the insight and perspective only you can provide.

Some Blogs to Consider

POLITICAL NEWS BLOGS

- Political Wire (www.politicalwire.com)
- Hotline On Call (<http://hotlineblog.nationaljournal.com>)

PARTY BLOGS

- Democratic National Committee (<http://www.democrats.org/blog.html>)
- Republican National Committee (<http://www.gop.com/Blog/>)

CANDIDATE BLOGS

- You can find blogs for all major candidates on their individual webpages.

ACTIVIST BLOGS

- DailyKos (www.dailykos.com)
- MyDD (www.mydd.com)
- AmericaBlog (www.americablog.com)
- Red State.Com (www.redstate.com)

