Getting media coverage is an effective way of educating the public and putting pressure on a campaign target. Local groups can play a vital role in campaigns by publishing articles, letters and photographs in local newspapers and talking about campaigns on the local radio. Media coverage is also a key tool in attracting new members to your group, and generally raising the profile of the group in your area.

**Talking to the press**

You don’t have to be very experienced to start contacting the media – anyone can do it. Some groups like to nominate a couple of people in their group to deal with the media and write press releases. This can involve:

- Being responsible for all contacts with local media
- Collecting and collating press cuttings for group records and displays
- Writing press releases

WDM’s media officer is always willing to support you with getting local media coverage, and most campaign packs will include a template press release.

It’s useful if people dealing with the press have a daytime phone number. Journalists only work office hours, so it’s important that your group can be contacted during the day.

Journalists are often under a lot of pressure, so don’t be surprised if they have little time to talk when you call them.

**TOP TIPS**

You can make your story more newsworthy by addressing the following factors:

i. **Timing** - Is the story topical? Can you link it into current news stories?

ii. **Significance** - How many people are affected? Why should people care about this?

iii. **Proximity** - The closer the story is to home (domestically), the more newsworthy it is. Can you make a link with your local area?

iv. **Human interest** - Where are the people? Stories increasingly rely on ‘people’ and their experiences to illustrate policies, causes, research or statistics. Human interest stories appeal to emotion and enable people to quickly connect and relate to an issue or cause.
**Press contacts**

Compile a press list of all your local media outlets, freesheets, local and regional papers, radio and TV stations. It is worth adding local specialised newsletters and journals of other local organisations like Friends of the Earth and Amnesty International, parish councils and other local bodies. If you create this as a ‘google document’, you can share it with others in your group and you can all keep it updated.

You can find out which your local newspapers are at [www.mediauk.com](http://www.mediauk.com)

Make a note of names, phone and email contacts. Get in touch with them and say that you are the press contact for your WDM group and ask for information on deadlines:

- When do papers go to press? Whether the paper is daily or weekly, make sure you know when its deadline is.
- When is the deadline for listings, details of local events for the ‘what’s on’ columns and for letters to the editor?

It is important to be able to send things to news editors and picture editors by name. Update the list frequently. Once you have met or spoken to a particular journalist, add their name to a contacts list. Building a working relationship with local reporters is sure to improve your coverage.

**Media stunts**

Media stunts can be a great way of getting a good photo which can be picked up by the local press. It’s always a good idea to send a short press release to your local media with information about when the stunt is taking place and what is going to happen. Some local newspapers will send a photographer or reporter to cover the action.

If you think press photographers or journalists might turn up, make sure you have a copy of your press release with contact details to hand to them.

It can be useful to choose a designated member of your group who can go and speak to journalists or photographers who turn up, find out who they are and who they work for, and help them get what they need – whether it’s an interview, a copy of your press release, or help getting the people doing the stunt in the right position for a good photo.

You can find out more tips in our guide *Organising a photo stunt*

**Taking photos**

When taking your own photos, think about what kind of shots would work best in the local paper.

- Take both horizontal and vertical pictures
- Take pictures from a variety of angles, and from both closer up and further away
- If you’re outdoors, use flash – even on a bright day – to avoid shadows on people’s faces

After the action, make sure to send a short report about it and the two or three best photos, in high resolution so that the quality is good enough for print, to your local newspaper. Sending these to the press straight away will give you the best chance of getting coverage, as daily papers are much more likely to report something that happened yesterday than something that happened five days ago.

If you have taken lots of pictures, don’t clog up the journalist’s inbox by sending them all – just pick the two or three best images.

**Knowing what works**

Look at copies of local papers, and listen to radio phone-ins and news programmes so that you can get a sense of the stories they actually use and the way they use them. If you can provide a press release and photo that is ready tailored to fit, you stand much more chance of getting some coverage. Maybe other campaign groups are getting coverage – what kind of stories are working for them?

**Writing a press release**

Press releases should be short and straightforward. There is a standard format for press releases that takes account of the fact that a busy journalist...
will just skim through your release. It is therefore vital that you present the information in a straightforward manner.

- The first sentence should contain the main point of your story.
- In the first paragraph you should briefly explain who, what, why and where, emphasising the local links.
- Use plain English and short words, sentences and paragraphs. Try to keep it shorter than one side of A4.
- Stick to facts in the text and use quotes to give opinions or add colour to your piece. You can quote yourself as group spokesperson (if you have agreed this with the rest of the group). Try to make the quotes lively, don’t be afraid to use more emotive language in your quote.
- Use a short, punchy and preferably attention-grabbing headline for your release.
- At the bottom of your release put “For Further information contact: ………” and leave a daytime number and an email address.
- Also at the bottom under ‘notes for the editor’ it is worth giving a brief explanation about what WDM is.
- When you send a press release, always follow it up with a phone call to make sure it has been received and acknowledged. This is more likely to make it stand out and be picked up. You can also follow up with the local media once the stunt or event has taken place.
- Don’t send your press release as an attachment. Local papers are far more likely to use a press release that’s emailed in the body of the text.

**Letters to the editor**

Letters to the editor are an easy way of getting your issue out there and read by thousands of people. They are a lot shorter than a press release and can express your opinion rather than reporting on an action or event. Letters are effective because:

- They reach a large audience
- Politicians will often monitor their local newspapers
- They show widespread support for a campaign
- WDM group members also sometimes get letters published in national papers, especially in response to articles that are relevant to our campaigns.

**TIPS FOR WRITING LETTERS**

- Always keep the readership of the newspaper in mind - if you are writing to a local paper, it helps to give global issues a local link.
- Keep it short (less than 200 words) and on one subject. Newspapers often have strict limits on the length of letters they will publish. Concise and interesting letters stand a good chance of being published.
- Look at the letters page of the publication to find out what the usual style and length is. There is no single correct style for writing letters; it all depends on the newspaper, the subject and your objectives.
- Always include your name, telephone number and address - some papers won’t print letters without them and they may want to verify the identity of the letter. However, they won’t print your contact details. You can also ask for your name to be withheld if you like.
- You can also submit letters signed by your local WDM group.
- Keep your tone calm and respectful – avoid being moralistic as people do not like feeling preached to or guilty.
- Avoid jargon – keep it simple.

**Local radio**

The local BBC radio station for your city or region is usually a good place to start, as they have a lot of news and talk programmes and are interested in what local people are doing. There may also be other local talk radio stations and community radio stations in your area.

Local stations are often very small affairs and rarely have the resources to visit you, so it is likely that any interview will be at the studio or by telephone – they prefer land lines. Remember that the radio journalist is purely after a good story and an interesting discussion. They rarely try to catch you out or ask very difficult questions. However, there can be a drive towards sensationalism, so the important thing is to stick to the facts and the research from WDM to support your arguments. Assume that the interviewer is on your side and aim to tell your story as clearly and informatively as possible.

Be prepared; ask in advance what will be covered and what the questions will be. During the conversation keep it firmly on the facts of the story. Use ordinary language, give lots of examples and avoid jargon.
Remember a lot of people don’t know what the WTO is or know what the World Bank does. Make it personal if you can. Say how you feel affected or concerned to make the issue come to life.

Preparing for interviews
Always prepare for an interview: Practise your key messages and think about tricky questions you might be asked. If during the interview you are asked a question that is challenging or off-topic, there is an easy way of dealing with it:

i. Acknowledge

ii. Bridge

iii. Key message

By acknowledging the question you can then bridge back to your key message. For example, “That’s an important issue, but what we are most concerned about is…” or “But what we’re talking about today is…”

Social media
Social media including blogs, Twitter and Facebook have reduced news organisations’ control over information. They provide a direct link between campaigners and individuals without having to go through a news provider. Social media is becoming increasingly prominent, and is generating news that is then published in traditional outlets.

It’s always worth writing a blog post for your group’s website – this can then be shared by your group and WDM nationally through Twitter and Facebook.

Keeping press records
Keep all press coverage and record any radio interviews that are organised by your local group. If you keep them in a book, it can be a great way of looking back and reminding your group about what it has achieved at the end of the year. It is also a nice thing to show new people who come to meetings as it shows some of the things your group has done.

Always send copies of local press coverage to WDM’s media officer and the group’s officer. WDM is always keen to see what kind of coverage a campaign gets across Britain. This helps us evaluate our campaigns and develop ongoing strategy.

Be persistent and proactive
Remember you won’t always succeed in getting coverage – and occasionally you may find that what does get printed is completely inaccurate. However, do keep on having a go. Time and time again we have discovered that our campaign targets care about the smallest mention in the press. Remember that you are part of a UK-wide network and that every tiny snippet of coverage is part of a bigger picture that can effect change.

If you have any questions or would like some advice, call WDM’s media officer on 020 7820 4900. You can also book media training for your group.

The World Development Movement campaigns against the root causes of poverty. Our network of local groups and activists keeps global justice on the agenda in towns and cities around the UK.

WDM’s activism team supports local campaigning. Contact us:
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