

Media Outreach

Why media outreach?

One of the most efficient and cost-effective ways to inform members of the community about the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is through local television, radio, and newspapers.

What is media outreach?

Media outreach takes many forms — from a simple call to a reporter to suggest a story, to a formal press release or an organized event. All can be effective. Match your media efforts to what works best in your community.

Why would the media be interested in covering SNAP issues?

There are many compelling sides to the SNAP story. It is about the strength of a local community working together to help those who are less fortunate. It is about people facing challenges and doing what is right for themselves and their families. It has all the elements of an interesting story that local media want to cover. Your local media have both a community responsibility and a business interest in providing readers and viewers with valuable information.

What does media outreach involve?

Media outreach consists of the following seven steps:

1. **SELECT** a target audience.
2. **DEVELOP** a media list.
3. **BRAINSTORM** story ideas.
4. **PREPARE** materials and information.
5. **IDENTIFY** spokespeople.
6. **CONTACT** the media.
7. **EVALUATE** your efforts.

You may not have the time or resources to follow every step. The important thing is to keep the media informed about what you are doing so they can get the word out to eligible people in your community that SNAP benefits are available to them.



Tips & Tools

Placing stories in your local community's print and broadcast media can lead to bigger things. Frequently, statewide and national media outlets get story ideas from coverage at the local level. Do not be surprised if a story about SNAP outreach in your community is picked up by one of the major networks! Recently, a story about SNAP participation in local media outlets in Pennsylvania and Texas caught the eye of National Public Radio and led to an airing of a positive story about SNAP.

How will this toolkit help me with media outreach?

This section of the toolkit elaborates on each of the seven steps. It also provides information on media outreach tactics that require a little more effort, such as media events and getting into the media's editorial section. Regardless of how elaborate your effort is, this section will help you to work more effectively with the press and garner positive media coverage of hunger, nutrition issues, and SNAP.

Understanding that you may be working with limited staff resources, this section of the toolkit also includes tips and template materials to use when you contact the media.

Step 1 Select a Target Audience

Select your audience(s). Determine whom you are trying to reach before you begin your media outreach. Generally, you are trying to reach people who are eligible for SNAP benefits but not receiving them. Specific examples include:

- People 60 years of age or older
- Children
- Families
- Working poor
- Immigrants

National research shows that the most underserved and hardest-to-reach populations tend to be seniors, immigrants, and the working poor.

The audience for your community may vary. Talk to people in your local SNAP office to see whom they are trying to reach. Do your own research on underserved populations and the best methods to reach your selected audience(s). For more on this, see the [Resources](#) section of this toolkit.

Goals

Before you begin your outreach, establish some simple goals for your effort. Examples include:

- Educating people about the nutrition
- Increasing the number of calls to the local, State, or national toll-free number
- Promoting the EBT card
- Promoting extended hours for SNAP application certification interviews

Step 2 Develop A Media List

Determine the best channels for reaching your target audience by researching the answers to questions listed to the right. Then begin to create a media list, which is a list of local news media organizations and their contact information.

Check with your partner organizations to see if they already have a list that they are willing to share.

Pointers to Develop a Media List

- Check the local phone book for listings of television and radio stations, local daily and weekly newspapers, and magazines.
- Use the U.S. Newspaper List Web site at www.usnpl.com.
- Check the local library for media reference books, such as the Bacon's Media Yellow Book or the News Media Yellow Book.
- Check newspaper and television Web sites. Search their online archives to find names of reporters who have covered stories on SNAP, hunger, poverty, or nutrition in the past. Review the articles previously written or stories broadcast by the reporter to get a feel for her or his style and areas of interest.
- Ask your clients about their preferred local media sources.
- Add reporters' names to your list when you read a story or meet a reporter working on a story about hunger or community groups.
- Add the local offices or bureaus of national media organizations. These are typically located in State capitals or large cities. Wire services like the Associated Press (AP), Reuters, and the Scripps Howard News Service provide articles to local newspapers. Large radio and television networks also distribute stories to local affiliates. A listing of these is provided at the end of this section.

As you build your media list, add the names and contact information (phone, e-mail, fax, address) for specific individuals within each organization.

These individuals may include reporters, editors, and/or producers.

By appealing to specific individuals, you are more likely to get a response.

Double-check to make sure your contact names are up-to-date. Call the main number of the newspaper or station and ask the operator for assistance.

On your list, also make note of publication deadlines so you can contact editors and reporters well in advance of when you hope to actually see your story in print.



Know your Audience

Does your target audience:

- Listen to certain radio stations?
- Watch particular TV channels?
- Read local community papers or daily newspapers?

Choosing the Most Appropriate Contact

There are a number of individuals within a news organization who shape what is printed or broadcast. People to include on your media list are:

Appropriate Contacts

Newspaper	TV	Radio
Reporters who cover health, social, and family issues	Reporters/on-air personalities	News directors
Writers for the calendar or community events page	Planning/assignment editors	Assignment editors
Community columnists	News broadcast producers	Public affairs show hosts and producers
Editorial page editors	Producers of morning shows or community programs	On-air personalities or commentators
Assignment editors who direct reporters or photographers to cover events		

Keep in mind that each media outlet may have a separate staff that writes for its Web site, and remember to include smaller media outlets, such as local cable access TV stations, community newspapers, and local parenting magazines and tabloids.

Step 3 Brainstorm Story Ideas

Although much of the news covered on TV or in the newspaper is unanticipated, you can sometimes generate interest by calling the media with a compelling story.

What makes your story newsworthy?

Consider the aspects of a news story that kept you engaged and interested. Provide local statistics and stories and offer the reporter an interesting angle.

What are some examples of newsworthy stories?

- Launch of a new program.
- Start of a new outreach effort for a specific audience like seniors, immigrants such as Hispanics, or working poor.
- Information about an organization or a community leader who has recently shown interest in issues such as nutrition or SNAP benefits.
- Community happenings that tie into SNAP issues, such as a factory closing or a new community partnership.

Five Components of a Newsworthy Story

TIMING

The word news means exactly what it says: things that are new. In this electronic age, people are used to receiving immediate news updates. If it happened today, it's news. If the same thing happened last week, it's no longer interesting. Think ahead to upcoming actions, events, holiday or seasonal stories, and volunteer appreciation stories — and plan your media outreach in advance so reporters can get the story while it is still news.

SIGNIFICANCE

The number of people affected by a story is important. If a significant number of people in your community are eligible for SNAP, yet are not tapping into the benefits, this will be considered newsworthy.

PROXIMITY

The closer the story hits to home, the more newsworthy it is.

PROMINENCE

Famous people get more coverage simply because they are famous. But celebrities do not have to come from Hollywood — they can be local politicians, prominent business owners, hometown sports heroes, or key community leaders.

HUMAN INTEREST

Human interest stories appeal to the readers' emotions. Talking about the benefits of SNAP through a first-person account is a good way to personalize what readers or viewers might otherwise think is merely a government program that has no relevancy to their lives.

Step 4 Prepare Materials

Once you have your story idea, get ready to present it to your local media.

How do I prepare my story?

Start by preparing any new materials and collecting background information. You might wish to check with your local SNAP office to see whether they have information you can use that is specific to your community.

In some cases, you might not need to develop any media materials. You may simply call or e-mail a reporter with your pitch (see [Step 6](#)).

If your story idea is time-sensitive or about a piece of breaking news, develop a [press release](#).

Sample media materials are provided in the [Media Relations](#) section.

Examples of Media Materials That Need to Be Prepared

PRESS RELEASE A 1–2 page document with information about your news. Press releases should be issued only for timely and significant happenings.

MEDIA ADVISORY A 1-page document that lists enough information to pique a reporter’s interest without giving away the whole story. Usually, these are sent out before media events (see [Media Events](#) section).

PITCH LETTER A brief letter that presents your story idea.

FACT SHEET A document with statistical information about your news.

BIOGRAPHIES Background information about your spokespeople.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ) Information about SNAP benefits, hunger, nutrition issues, and so forth, including such information as locations of local SNAP offices, the local toll-free number, and extended office hours or online applications.

GRAPHICS Charts on local enrollment trends, participation, or numbers of people who are eligible, but not participating.

Step 5 Identify Spokespersons

Official Spokespeople

Identify people whom the media can interview about the story. These may be local health experts, nutritionists, grocers, or human services providers. Be sure you have the full name, title, and contact information of these individuals readily available. Be sure that your spokespeople are approved by their organizations to speak to the media, and that they:

- Know the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP);
- Are available to appear on television or radio, and be interviewed by the print press;
- Are comfortable speaking to media;
- Are able to clearly communicate the point you want to get across;
- Can respond effectively to questions; and
- Will be considered credible, trustworthy sources of information by viewers or readers.

Testimonials

To add a human interest angle to the story, try to find people in your community who would be willing to share their stories with the media and talk about how SNAP benefits helped them get back on their feet. Speak to your partners to see if they can help identify someone like this.

Once someone has been selected, make sure the person is comfortable telling his or her story and has a positive experience to share. You will also need to confirm with the media outlet whether or not they have to use the true identity of the person giving the testimonial. A SNAP recipient may be uncomfortable using his or her name; some individuals might want to use an alias and others might want to just use their first name.

Step 6 Contact The Media

What are some helpful tips on contacting reporters?

- Select the most appropriate reporters for your specific story.**
Do not bombard reporters with story ideas that are not relevant to the reporter's beat or specialty. For example, if you are pitching a story about the economic benefits of SNAP, contact the reporter on your media list who covers the local economy.
- Find out how reporters like to be contacted and respect their time.**
Ask if a reporter prefers phone calls, e-mail, or news the old-fashioned way — by U.S. mail. Reporters may keep odd hours and juggle several assignments at once. Be respectful of their schedules and how they like to receive information. If you need to send out a press release or media advisory to a mass list rather than individual names, be sure to put e-mail addresses in the blind copy (bcc:) field to avoid sharing e-mail addresses with all the other recipients.
- Review your talking points before you call reporters.**
Have your ideas ready (see [Media Relations section](#) for a pitch script sample) since most reporters are extremely busy and will give you only a minute or so to make your case before deciding if they are interested.
- Make sure your e-mail subject line is descriptive but concise.**
Include a short (about two paragraphs), catchy pitch along with your contact information. Make the reporter's job as easy as possible by providing the most important information in the first paragraph. Include a link to the SNAP Web page (<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/Default.htm>), as a reporter will often visit the Web site for insight before calling back.
- Avoid using all caps or excessive punctuation.**
Reporters avoid anything that looks like unsolicited e-mail or "spam." Avoid using attachments when contacting a reporter for the first time, as he or she may suspect the attachment of containing a computer virus. Copy and paste relevant text into the body of the e-mail.
- Introduce yourself fully on phone calls.**
Reference previous conversations, if applicable, to jog their memory as to who you are and why you're calling. Ask whether it is a good time to talk. If they cannot talk, offer to call back later at their convenience. If they have time to talk, get to your point quickly and gauge their level of interest based on the response. If they are not interested, they will let you know.
- Be reliable.**
Nothing will squelch a media relationship faster than a promise you cannot deliver. Do your best to get reporters what they need in advance of their deadlines. However, if you won't be able to come through, let them know as early as possible.



Reporters' Deadlines

PRINT

Call a newsroom between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., when reporters are most likely not in planning meetings or working against a 5 p.m. deadline.

TELEVISION

Call assignment or planning editors after 10 a.m. and before 3 p.m., but not in the hour or so before a noon newscast. It's best to call the assignment desk after the morning planning meeting, which usually ends between 9:30 and 10 a.m.

RADIO

Call early, around 7:30 to 8:30 a.m. After that, staff often have planning meetings, but you can start calling again after 10 a.m. News directors, reporters, and producers are often gone by the afternoon.

- Follow up.**

Although some reporters will provide coverage after one phone interview, that is frequently not enough. It is important to be in front of reporters on a consistent basis with compelling information that demonstrates what you are pitching is viable, credible, and worthy of coverage. Be sure to offer reporters the additional elements they would need to round out their stories — photos, Web site information, toll-free numbers, listing of local SNAP offices, and additional resources, if necessary.
- Know when to keep at it and when to let go.**

No matter how passionate you are about a story, some reporters will never buy in. A good way to circumvent a quick “no” is to pitch by phone rather than email (unless that is a reporter’s preference). This will get you better results and allow you to build the relationships you need to ensure consistent success. When using the phone, leave one message only, and then continue to call at different times of the day until you are able to speak to the reporter. Once you have your content on the line, it is much easier to make your case, as you can engage a reporter in a conversation and handle questions or objections as they arise.

Timing Your Outreach

Monthly publications are typically magazines, often designed to appeal to a particular segment of the community. They are not as focused on time-sensitive news events, and are therefore good channels for communicating “big picture” stories and features. Stories created for monthlies must often be written 3 to 6 months prior to publication date.

Weeklies can come in a magazine or newspaper format, and often are distributed free at grocery stores or other popular community locations. Plan on contacting weeklies 2 to 6 weeks before you hope to see your story in print.

Dailies are defined as local newspapers that focus on breaking news, although they are also good outlets for in-depth features. For feature stories, plan on contacting dailies 2 to 3 weeks before you hope to see your story in print. For time sensitive news stories, contact approximately 1 week out.

Broadcast outlets include television and radio. Broadcast news tends to provide live coverage of news events, and relies on images or audio sound bites to tell the story. Broadcast outlets can also be interested in longer stories, particularly for morning or community shows. For feature-length stories, contact the producer of the segment you are pitching 2 to 3 weeks before you hope to see your story on the air. For more time-sensitive news stories contact approximately 1 week out.

Step 7 Evaluate

Reviewing and analyzing your media outreach allows you to determine whether you reached your goals and what did and didn't work. It also gives you an opportunity to share your success. The end result need not be an exhaustive report, just some information to help you track your efforts.

How can I chart media outreach efforts?

- Set goals before you begin so that you have something to measure (for example, place one newspaper article or TV story about SNAP benefits, promote the local toll-free number, or increase inquiries about SNAP by 10 percent).
- Establish a starting point (known as a baseline), if possible. Take note of how many calls you are getting about SNAP benefits, or how much media coverage you are receiving now. If you do this, you can quantify improvements and increases.
- Begin your analysis as soon as possible after your media push or event so that everything is fresh in your mind.
- Use numbers to paint your success story: "There was a 50-percent increase in media coverage compared to last year," or, "After our appearance on the local radio show, calls about SNAP benefits increased by 20 percent."
- Use anecdotal evidence to show your success: "Many clients remarked that they didn't think they would be eligible for SNAP benefits until they saw the TV story." In addition, use quotes from clients that support your success: "I was surprised to learn that I might still qualify for SNAP benefits even though I have a job."
- Include information on the reach of a media outlet: "An article ran in the Anytown News, which has a circulation of 80,000." This information is usually available on the media outlet's Web site.
- Look at what is said in the media coverage you receive to determine whether you communicated your key points. If you wanted to convey that every accommodation is being made to help elderly people apply for benefits, did that come across in your story?
- Make copies of the newspaper articles that include your contributions. Make sure they are well presented. Keep a file of media coverage that you can easily access.
- Share articles with partners, or incorporate articles in a presentation folder for potential partners.

How do I monitor for media coverage?

Following are some quick and easy ways to monitor coverage on a shoestring budget:

- Check the outlet's Web site. Most searches are free for any time up to a week or month.
- If you submitted an announcement to a newsletter or bulletin, ask about distribution numbers, so you get a rough estimate of how many people read your message.
- If you know a TV story will air at a certain time, record the segment.
- To find out the circulation or audience numbers for newspapers and TV, check the outlet's Web site. If you need to call to ask for this information, the advertising department will usually give it to you.

What are some additional media tracking resources?

NewzGroup Provides comprehensive statewide press clipping services of all daily and weekly newspapers in Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, South Carolina, Texas, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

<http://www.newzgroup.com/>

Lexis-Nexis This is probably the most comprehensive online database of full-text news and magazine articles, but it is also among the most expensive of the available services.

www.lexisnexis.com/

GoogleNews Google News is a free news site that aggregates headlines from news sources worldwide, groups similar stories together and displays them according to each reader's personalized interests. Users can set up their page to show the stories that best represent their interests and can also sign up to receive weekly, daily or as-it-happens email alerts.

<http://news.google.com/>

Clip & Copy Clip&Copy is a specialized online news alert and press clipping service covering a targeted set of news web sites, including leading wire services and hundreds of online newspapers, magazines and trade journals. Clip&Copy ensures that you are not infringing on copyrights as most articles contain instantly accessible rights to make copies, distribute and use for web site postings. Coverage ranges from free to \$9.95/month.

<http://www.clipandcopy.com/index.asp>

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<http://www.newspaperclips.com/npcapp/default.aspx>

Lone Buffalo Offers both a daily clipsheet as well as ad hoc services for real time monitoring for certain issues or programs. The service looks a several news sources and delivers the daily and breaking news reports via email.

<http://www.lonebuffalo.com/index.html>



Keeping a Record of Media Coverage

- Locate either an online or print copy of the story.
- Cut out or print off the title of the publication (also known as the flag, logotype, or masthead).
- Make sure the date and byline (reporter's name) are included on the article. If one or the other is not included on the printed version, type the date and byline (sometimes the byline will be "Staff" or "Reuters") on a separate piece of paper; cut it out.
- Lay the components out on a white, blank piece of paper in the following order: flag, byline, date, and content.
- Tape the components neatly onto your blank paper; make sure the edges are not folded.
- Photocopy your laid out news article. Consider making two copies (one for a report and one for reference.)

10 Tips For Conducting Effective Media Outreach

- Tip 1 Identify who you want to reach.**
Who is your target audience? Do you want to reach all eligible nonparticipants, or do you want to focus on a specific audience, such as seniors or the Latino community?
- Tip 2 Determine the best way to reach them.**
Does your target audience read community newspapers? Do they watch TV? What time of day are they watching TV? Do they listen to the radio? Make a list of the relevant media outlets and reporters.
- Tip 3 Set simple, but measurable goals.**
What do you want to achieve through media outreach? For example, do you want to increase inquiries to the toll-free number, inform people about the nutrition benefits of SNAP?
- Tip 4 Think about the best timing for your story.**
Does your news need to be released immediately? Would it be better to wait for a more opportune time such as after the holidays when people are struggling to make ends meet?
- Tip 5 Think about what you want to say.**
Formulate the message that you want to communicate to your target audience, e.g., promote toll-free number, extended office hours, the nutrition benefits of SNAP.
- Tip 6 Think about ways to make your story interesting.**
Can you get real-life testimonials from SNAP participants? Could a statewide story be tied into your pitch?
- Tip 7 Determine how you are going to communicate your message.**
Will you simply call the reporter and provide background information? Do you need to put together a press release or host a press conference?
- Tip 8 Determine who is going to say it.**
Do you have people lined up that reporters can speak to, like a SNAP office director, a food bank supervisor, or a nutritionist?
- Tip 9 Be targeted in your media outreach.**
Your pitch will be more effective if you reach the right person. Spend some time reading, watching, and listening to the media outlets you will pitch and recent coverage by the reporter you will be contacting. How far in advance do you need to reach out? What time of day would work best? Do reporters prefer email or a phone call?
- Tip 10 Evaluate your results and share.**
Reviewing and analyzing your media outreach lets you know if you reached your goals and what did and did not work. Share your success with others!