



Guide to Pitching Environmental Stories to Media

Before Pitching:

- **Know your local media outlets and reporters:** Look for environmental-focused stories in your local media publications and make a list of which reporters frequently write about environmental issues
 - Get creative! You don't have to be limited to hard news or big national publications. Depending on the story, smaller local newsletters, social media creators, or magazines can be a good partner
- **Know your audience:** Before choosing which or how many outlets to pitch to, think about what your target audience is and if the paper/channel/radio station is the best fit to reach them
 - For stories about a local event, you would want to focus on smaller local media organizations
- **Consider writing a media release:** A media release is essentially a pitch, but may be longer and include quotes that can be plucked out and put directly into an article.
 - CELA generally writes media releases that are between 300 and 400 words
 - Prioritize using media releases for big updates where your members are the authority on the subject

Constructing a Pitch:

- **Subject Line:** Your subject line should make it immediately clear what the purpose of the email is and a succinct, interesting description of what the news event is about. Some examples include:
 - Event Alert: [your organization] speaking in city council about safe water
 - Story Suggestion: new policy will impact community air quality
 - Op-ed Pitch: City council needs to take [environmental risk] seriously

- **What is the news?:** The topics we work on are always interesting, but reporters need to know why it is important to cover now. Make this clear by doing one or more of the following:
 - Link the story to an upcoming event or new development, such as an event/anniversary, the publishing of a report, or the advancement of a new policy
 - Link your story to other things happening in the news. For example, national coverage of wildfires could make ongoing work on indoor air quality in your community more newsworthy.
- **Why should I care?:** Make sure that in addition to telling the reporter why this is newsworthy now, you make it clear how this impacts their publication's audience. This could include:
 - Briefly outlining health impacts associated with your environmental cause
 - Making sure people are informed about an opportunity to participate in the democratic process
 - Will a new policy impact local development or industry?
- **When should it be published?:** Timelines matter, make sure to let the reporter know when they should publish this story and make sure to give them 1-2 weeks notice when possible
- **Who is available to provide comment?:** Provide the names, titles, areas of expertise, contact information and availability of people from your organization or other experts who the journalist might want to speak to
 - Whenever possible, make sure people outside of your organization are aware that you are sharing their contact information
 - Consultation isn't necessary if you are listing a public figure, such as a city councilor
- **What background material should they review?:** If there is a report, website, meeting transcript, legislation, or other material, include the document or link in your email
 - You can also provide a short sentence about why the document you have attached/linked to is valuable
- **Do...**
 - Keep it brief! We want to make it clear why the journalists should cover this story, not write it for them. Using headings and bullet points can help make the information easier to absorb
 - Build a relationship. Even if this pitch isn't accepted, thank the person for responding and let that know that they can reach out any time to speak to your experts and that you may contact them in the future if other opportunities arise
 - Email your pitch directly to a section editor if you don't have a specific journalist in mind

- Make it clear exactly when and how they can contact you. Reporters are juggling lots of short interviews and they appreciate when you are specific about your availability
- **Don't...**
 - Expect every pitch to get a reply. Some journalists get lots of emails and don't have the time to reply to each one
 - Ask to see the article before it is published. Journalists may ask you clarifying questions, but it is against most publications' policies to let sources see or edit the article before publishing
 - Overwhelm people with emails. If your pitches are not getting accepted, it might be time to find new people to contact.
 - Expect every journalist to be a subject matter expert. Journalists are often reporting on multiple things at a time and may not have specific knowledge about your issue. Make sure to use plain language and explain why your cause matters

After you Pitch:

- **Stay organized:** Keep a record of why you have reached out to, when, and if they have replied. This will make your life easier if you need to send a follow-up or remember what your past correspondence with a specific journalist has been
- **Stay on message:** Discuss what the ideal "key message" would be for people reading this article and make sure that the person speaking to the media is prepared to keep the conversation focused instead of getting too deep into the weeds
- **Tell people about your success:** Help amplify the reach of an article by posting it on your organization's social media accounts or asking individual members to post it
- **Track your success:** If your story gets a lot of traction, other outlets may pick it up without reaching out to you. Set up google alerts to make sure you are keeping track of who is talking about this issue and keep a list of articles that you have been featured in for future reference