



Benefits Outreach Toolkit: Guide to Using Earned Media

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Guide to Using Earned Media

Thinking about using an earned media approach to find people potentially eligible for benefits? Here's what you need to have in place.



Must Have

- Media list for local broadcast TV, radio, print outlets & blogs (template provided)
- Tailored pitch to send to targets (template provided)
- Expert from your organization available to speak to a reporter/producer/anchor
- The staff time to dedicate to pitching, follow-up, and interview coordination/prep



Nice to Have

- Beneficiary willing to speak to a reporter about their experience getting help
- Relevant statistics about seniors (e.g., the average cost of living for a senior in the region, the average monthly Social Security payment for seniors in the region, etc.)



Cost/Resource Implications

Pitching reporters can be totally free; using the resources in this guide and the internet, you can compile all the information you'll need to conduct outreach to reporters. You can spend a lot of time or a little on media outreach. However, generally speaking, the more time you're able to spend researching the right media targets for your pitch, tailoring the pitch accordingly and making follow-up calls, the greater the likelihood that you'll get traction.

What is earned media?

Earned media is any media coverage secured from direct outreach (“pitching”) to reporters by you or a consultant you hire to pitch on your behalf. The opposite of “earned” media is paid media, i.e., paid advertising you see on TV or in the newspaper.

Strategy overview

Research shows that, when it comes to the media, local television and radio are the primary ways that older Americans get their news. This toolkit describes how to approach reporters in these two venues. However, you may wish to include local print and online outlets (such as blogs) in your outreach as well, as secondary targets.

You should focus on “pitching” relevant reporters at your local TV, radio, and newspaper outlets (more below on how to identify these contacts). A pitch is a short e-mail to a reporter asking them to cover your story or to have someone from your organization on their show. It is meant to persuade the reporter/producer that what you are contacting them about is newsworthy.



What should a pitch include?

Your pitch should explain the issue/problem, what your organization does to address the issue/problem, and what expertise you can provide. When possible, include links to relevant statistics and data to back up your arguments. For example, to highlight the issue of under-enrollment of low-income seniors into benefit programs, you might include statistics such as the number of older adults facing economic insecurity (which can be found using the Elder Index at: www.basiceconomicsecurity.org/EI/), and information on how your organization has helped connect people to benefits, and what this means for their longer term financial outlook.

Because it can be difficult to cut through the news cycle, which is so focused on “breaking news,” a tailored “ask the expert” pitch may provide easier access to getting profiled by the media. This concept draws on an “expert” from your organization who is able to speak concisely on air and answer common questions from older adults about benefits/their topic of expertise. This expert can be a benefits counselor or your CEO – for these types of pitches, the title matters less than their expertise/depth of knowledge. The “ask the expert” pitch essentially provides producers with a “segment in a box,” i.e., all the resources they’d need to put together several minutes of a newscast. We’ve included two sample pitch templates in the Appendix.

Tips for building a media list

Identify target outlets

- Targets should include all local TV stations in your town/city. Google all the stations including: ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX, CW/PBS affiliates (Search term: “[town/city name] ABC affiliate, NBC affiliate, etc.>) If you live in a smaller town, you might be part of a larger media market and not have a local TV station. If that is the case, [identify which market you are served by](#) and pitch the stations in that market.



Find contact information

- Some stations list their contact information on their website, including where to send press releases. If it's not listed, call the station's main line. You will likely be sent to a receptionist. Ask for the direct line to the newsroom, and ask the person who answers for the Assignment Desk email (where to send pitches).
- For newspapers and radio stations, Google “local newspaper for [CITY/TOWN] and “local radio station for [CITY/TOWN].” Local newspapers and radio stations operate similarly to TV stations. Their contact information may be listed on the website, but to be certain, call their main number and ask for the newsroom, then ask for their direct line and the best email address to send pitches or advisories.

Select who to target

- **TV:** Look for booking or line producers for the 7, 8, 9, 10, or 11 a.m. shows, and for the 12 and 4 p.m. shows. (Note: Some stations will not have shows for all of these hours.) When you call the newsroom at TV stations you can ask for the contact information for the producers of these shows.
- **Radio:** In addition to producers or bookers for key programs, pitch reporters who cover consumer affairs, seniors, health or local/community news. If your local stations do not have reporters who cover those beats, identify and pitch the reporters who have covered one of those issues more than once.
- **Print:** Focus on reporters covering consumer affairs, seniors, and health.

Organize your contacts

- We recommend creating a spreadsheet with names and contact information for each of the media contacts you find. You should also include a notes column to track updates from your outreach and conversations. A sample media list template is included in the Appendix.

Conducting outreach to producers and reporters

- Begin outreach via email, sending the pitch to all your targets. The first round of email outreach rarely results in an overwhelming response, but don't get discouraged! Reporters sometimes get hundreds, or even thousands of emails a day. After one to two days, call the reporters and producers and make the same pitch over the phone. Have your pitch typed out or on the computer in front of you for reference, and even practice your pitch on a friend a couple of times before you call; this will help put you at ease when you get a reporter or producer on the phone.
- When calling make sure you've been connected to the newsroom, then ask for the specific person you are looking to pitch. If they connect you, here's an example of how to frame the conversation:

"Hi my name is [NAME], I emailed you about the effort by my organization [NAME] to raise awareness about how seniors in [CITY] can access benefits like housing or food assistance that they are eligible for. Do you have a moment to talk? (Yes) [Here in \[CITY\] the average senior needs \[AMOUNT\] a month to get by, but \[PERCENTAGE\] live on far less.](#) Many seniors have to choose between paying for medication and buying groceries. We want to help them access benefits they are entitled to, but may not know about. Would you be interested in speaking with a senior who received help from our organization?"

OR (if you are pitching an expert)

"Would you be interested in having an expert from [ORGANIZATION NAME] come on to talk about some of the challenges seniors face in paying their bills, and what benefits and resources are available that they may take advantage of?"

- Don't be deterred if the reporter/producer/assignment manager is in a rush or seems dismissive...remember, they are people too! They may just be very overwhelmed on that particular day. They might say: "I don't have time to talk right now. Can you email me more information?" This is why you should have your pitch handy and ready to send right away.

- If they don't seem immediately interested, provide them with the most relevant information – such as the average number of seniors falling into the gap between their Social Security income and the cost of basic necessities or living in poverty in the area – or ask them what could make them more interested in the piece. If they aren't the right person to pitch, ask them who the right person might be and ask if they can connect you.

Note

When calling specific reporters or producers, it's good to start off by asking if they have a moment to talk, but if you are calling newsrooms to see if they received your pitch and don't have the name of a specific person to ask for, just go right into the pitch!

- If you're able to get someone on the phone, they may say they haven't seen the pitch or don't remember it. Offer to send it again and try to gauge their interest. Then follow up in three to five days via email. A day or two after that, call again. This time, work to get feedback from them on what could make them interested in a segment.
- If you are really struggling to break through, conduct further research on the reporters at the station and what they've covered to make sure you are targeting the right people. Or better yet, search within the station's website to view archived content, and identify reporters/producers who have covered similar stories in the past.

Booking a segment

- If you receive interest or book a TV or radio segment, there are a few things to keep in mind:
 - If you book a straightforward interview with a radio or print reporter, ask how they'd like to set it up (do they want to come to you, meet at a mutually agreeable location, or do the interview over the phone?)
 - If possible, for any interview, try to get details about what questions they may ask. Sometimes producers will ask you for ideas or sample questions your expert can answer. Examples could include:
 - What do older adults struggle to pay the most (medical care, housing, food) and how do you help them?
 - Which programs are most older adults not taking advantage of?
 - What are some of the choices your older adults are forced to make or things they go without to make ends meet?

- If you book a segment or guest appearance on a TV or radio show, find out if the interview will be in-studio. If so, confirm what time your expert needs to arrive, where they need to go, who they need to ask for then they arrive, etc. Also, ask who they'll be talking to on the show (the reporter/anchor), if the segment will be live or taped, and if there will be live callers, so that you can prepare your expert accordingly. Finally, get a good number for the producer so you can contact them on the day-of in case of an emergency.

- If they're going to be on camera, tell your expert to dress in basic, solid colors (avoid patterns, if possible; remember that even stripes can come across as distracting to viewers at home!).



What to do after a clip runs

- Courtesy counts (and it can help ensure you're building a positive relationship with the reporter for the future!). After a story or segment runs, send a brief note to the reporter/producer you worked with to thank them for the opportunity.

- Also, don't forget to share the story with friends and supporters to ensure that as many people as possible get to see it! The outlet will likely post the story online, but if you can't find it, don't be shy about asking the producer/reporter for the link. Share that link to your social media accounts (Twitter, Facebook, etc.) tagging the news outlet and/or reporter when possible (they like to get a pat on the back!). Also, post it on your website and link to it in your newsletter (if you have one).
- If you have any regional partnerships with other organizations, you can also ask them to share your social media content on their own feeds, or in their own newsletters.
- If there is something inaccurate in the story, don't be afraid to ask, nicely, if they'd be willing to fix the error online or issue a correction. Nine times out of ten, they will have no problem fixing the error. The more detail you can provide about what happened and how to fix it, the better.

Appendix A: Sample Pitches

Version 1: Sample “Ask an Expert” Pitch

SUBJECT: Ask an expert segment on benefits for older [INSERT STATE NAME, i.e. Ohioans]?

Hi [REPORTER FIRST NAME],

My organization, [NAME OF ORGANIZATION], is a [nonprofit/state agency] working to help older adults in [STATE] access benefit programs that help make ends meet.

More than [XX] percent of older adults in [STATE] do not have enough income to pay for basic necessities. These seniors struggle every month to afford groceries, medication, and rent, which often forces them to choose one over the other. And this budget gap doesn't just worry older adults - it's also top of mind for their kids and grandkids. Baby boomers are especially concerned about their parents aging in comfort.

Would you be interested in talking to [EXPERT NAME] from [YOUR ORGANIZATION] about the challenges facing [STATE] seniors who are in the "gap," the work we do, and resources that are available to help [STATE] seniors connect with benefits? If you're interested in speaking with [EXPERT FIRST NAME] for an upcoming segment or story, just let me know and I'd be happy to connect you and provide additional resources.

Thanks for your time,

[NAME]

[PHONE]

Version 2: Local Voice Pitch

(use this version if you have a beneficiary spokesperson who received help from your organization and is willing to be interviewed or talk on-camera)

SUBJECT: Help for [CITY/REGION] seniors

Hi [REPORTER FIRST NAME],

My organization, [NAME OF ORGANIZATION], is a [nonprofit/state agency] working to help older adults in [STATE] access benefit programs that help pay for Medicare, prescriptions, food, and more.

[CLIENT NAME] is a local senior who was struggling to pay his rent, pay for his medications, and afford his heating bill. [INCLUDE ADDITIONAL POWERFUL DETAILS ABOUT PERSONAL STORY, e.g., before he came to us he was forced to stop heating his home in the winter in order to pay for his prescriptions.] We helped him apply for the Medicare Extra Help program and housing assistance. Now he receives an extra \$200 each month to pay for necessities.

[CLIENT NAME]'s story reflects the challenges many seniors in [CITY/STATE] who live on a fixed income. More than [XX] percent of older adults in [STATE] do not have enough income to pay for basic necessities. These seniors struggle every month to afford groceries, medication, and rent, which often forces them to choose one over the other.

Would you be interested in speaking with [CLIENT NAME] about his experience and how the benefit programs have changed his life? You could visit his home and talk with him about this small budget increase that has made a big difference. Let me know if I can provide more information or if you're interested in setting up an interview.

Thanks for your time,

[NAME]

[PHONE]

Appendix B: Sample Press List Template

First Name	Last Name	Outlet	Beat/Title	Email	Phone	Notes
Jessie	Williams	WXYZ-TV	Producer	jessie.williams@wxyz.com	(248) 827-7777	No answer when called on 5.23