

Generating Media Coverage

The media inform the public about issues, influence public opinion, promote timely citizen action, and exert direct pressure on decision makers. Decision makers follow their local media carefully, especially coverage of their own activities. As a policy tool, the media provide the opportunity to get the word out in the following ways: news stories, feature stories, editorials, letters to the editor, opinion pieces, blogs, radio call-in shows, and talk shows. Keeping your issue visible in the news also encourages others to help you in your cause.

How to Get in the News

Childhood obesity is a topic that generates a lot of media attention. As you begin your work to help schools in your state sell healthier snacks and beverages, you have the ability to tap into that media opportunity. Below are some ways you can do that on an ongoing basis:

- Meet with key reporters at newspapers and TV and radio stations to announce the launch of your efforts to improve school foods and beverages (see [Talking Points for Meetings and Phone Calls](#)).
- Conduct a survey of what is sold in school vending machines (see [Survey of School Vending Machines](#)) and announce your results to the press either in a news release or at a press conference (see [Sample Press Release](#)).
- Testify before the school board on the connection between childhood obesity and soft-drink and junk-food consumption (see [Sample Testimony](#)). Notify the press in advance that you will be testifying and supply them with a copy of your testimony.
- Attend a school board or PTA meeting where your issue is being discussed. Afterward, give a report to the press about the meeting.
- Ask a school board or PTA member to introduce a resolution to ban sugary drinks in schools. Invite the press to the meeting and supply them with a copy of the resolution.
- Organize a fundraiser for your school that demonstrates an alternative to selling junk food in schools. TV cameras love action, so host a fun run, talent show, or all-night-skate-a-thon and invite a TV reporter to do a feature story (see [Healthy Fundraising Ideas](#)).
- Invite a newspaper reporter to write a story or a television reporter to do a feature piece on what foods are offered in schools and what kids are eating from à la carte lines, vending machines, school stores or school fundraisers.
- Set up a display of soft drink cans or one-pound boxes of sugar in a prominent location in the community (library, town hall, at school, etc.) to demonstrate the amount of soda or sugar children consume annually. For example, the average child drinks one and half servings of soda pop per day (USDA Changes in Children's Diets: 1989-1991 to 1994-1996). This is equal to 365 cans of soda or 31 one-pound boxes of sugar per year.
- National news stories can be "brought home" to the local community. Keep an eye on national news stories covered on the TV news or in the newspaper and add a local spin. For example, after a story comes out on a new national obesity study, ask reporters to write about how school foods and beverages may be contributing to problem.
- For news stories, timeliness is critical. To publicize an upcoming event, send an advisory one week before the event and follow it up with a reminder one to two days before the event. Contact editors and reporters directly via phone or e-mail.
- For television news coverage, provide interesting visuals, events or happenings, such as testifying before the school board, a display of soda cans, or gathering signatures on petitions at the local grocery store.

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- Some local television and radio stations have “talk” or “magazine” format shows about subjects ranging from gardening to government. Find out which shows are taped locally and open to guests. Call the producer for that show and arrange for a spokesperson for your issue to be a guest on the show.
- Radio call-in shows often have open discussions, which offer the opportunity for you to simply call from home and discuss issues on the show without having to contact the station in advance. Make your call brief, to the point, and supported by the facts. Encourage listeners to take action on the issue.