

V. Media Guide

A. Coordinating Publicity

Newspapers and radio and television stations are important partners to help publicize your event and recruit participants for the GSRC. Good relationships with local media representatives can help make the Cleanup even more successful. It's not necessary to get on national television or in major daily newspapers. Local media and news outlets are always looking for local story ideas—especially stories about local people and kids doing good work in the community.

If possible, try to find someone with experience in public relations or journalism to help you work with the media. This person should also have enough time to develop the media contacts you need and respond to any media interviews that the GSRC or Coastal Commission staff helps arrange for you. Part of your publicity campaign is to convince reporters that this is an important community event that they need to cover. Your promotion director's name and telephone number(s) should appear on all news releases, public service announcements, and other communications with the media.

If you start early, you may be able to get publicity assistance by recruiting a local newspaper, radio, or television station to sign on as one of your official Cleanup sponsors. Radio and television stations reach a large portion of the community through brief mentions on the air, and a well-known local personality may be willing to serve as a spokesperson for your event. Keep in mind that an alliance with one particular television station or radio group might preclude coverage on other networks/stations. So choose wisely - start with the highest rated station in your market and work down the list.

If you don't have a media sponsor for your event, you need to start early to develop personal contacts with the media long before the your River Cleanup (see Developing Media Contacts below). Good relationships with reporters and public service directors increase the chances of getting coverage of the next scheduled Cleanup.

B. Developing Media Contacts

The more people who know about your Cleanup, the more likely you are to have a successful and profitable event. Start early to develop a list of media contacts to whom you will send Cleanup information. This list should include:

- Local newspaper reporters who cover “lifestyle” or “metro” sections, the outdoors, environment, science, and community affairs;
- radio and television public service directors;
- local talk-show hosts who might interview you and/or any of your sponsors;
- editors of community group newsletters/papers; and
- public access channels that cover community events, including local university channels.

You will also want to develop a separate “community contacts” list of other people who might help you to get the word out about your GSRC event and help recruit participants. This list might include:

- Elected community officials;
- principals and teachers of local schools and board of education members;
- leaders of scouting, Camp Fire, or 4-H groups;
- religious leaders;
- officers of environmental or service clubs; and
- members of local Chamber of Commerce.

If possible, put your lists into a computer database, so you can add and change information as your planning progresses and create mailing labels directly from lists so you can send different mailings to the same people without addressing the envelopes each time.

Your direct promotion methods should be augmented by more widespread, indirect approaches such as:

- Hanging posters in stores, schools, churches, etc.;
- Distributing flyers with your River Cleanup information to local community and environmental groups;
- Placing calendar notices in newspapers, magazines, and newsletters;
- Facebook/Twitter (or other social media) postings
- Broadcasting on radio and television stations; and
- Posting notices on community bulletin boards.



C. Is a River Cleanup News?

News can be any type of story that is of interest to your local media outlets. The key when considering sending a news story to the media is: does it have local impact? Your local media is only interested in stories for or about the community reader, listener, or viewer, and a local River Cleanup definitely fits that bill.

News stories can be:

- An announcement or account of your Cleanup
- What will or has happened to a local person or people (e.g., stories about River Cleanup volunteers)
- Local information people need (e.g., “More than 1 ton of litter is collected by your Cleanup each year. This can be prevented if everyone “Packs It In and Packs It Out” instead of leaving their litter at the river.”)

D. From the Media Perspective

When you work with media by pitching stories or writing op-ed pieces, it is important to consider things from the media perspective. Here are some of the things an editor, reporter or news director will consider when assessing the value of your story:

- **Impact or consequence:** How many people does the event or idea affect, and how seriously does it affect them? To what extent is the information useful to their readership? Does anyone care?
- **Proximity or locality:** It's news only if it's happening within the media outlet's circulation or viewership area. If it's in your watershed but outside their news area, there is less interest.
- **Timeliness:** Today's news may be stale tomorrow. The best time to tell an important story is as soon as possible. Have a draft of a Press Release that you can insert facts and figures into, so that it's ready to be emailed to local media as soon as your Cleanup is over.
- **Prominence:** Names don't always make news. Still, happenings that involve well-known people or institutions are likely to be interesting even if not important. If a local celebrity or politician is involved in your Cleanup, let the media know.
- **Novelty or drama:** The unusual makes news. Firsts make news. Bizarre makes news. It's always useful to collect information about weird and wonderful things that you find during your River Cleanup.



E. Media Relations Dos & Don'ts

Dos:

1. Make their jobs easy.
 - Give them information that is accurate, thorough and within their deadline.
 - Schedule phone interviews at convenient times or in-person interviews at accessible locations, preferably down at the river while your Cleanup is taking place.
 - Develop fact sheets about your Cleanup—how many years you've been doing it, how many people join in, how many boy-scout troops, etc. And it's important to give them facts about your river too – where it starts and ends, any special features, etc.
 - Provide them with photos! Photos of adults and children cleaning the river, or “before” and “after” photos are the best!
2. Make sure spokespersons are accessible when needed. Apart from paid staff, make sure that volunteers of all sorts of shapes and sizes and ages are available to be interviewed about your Cleanup.

Spokespeople should:

- Always know what the facts are at the time, even it's just about their small piece of the River Cleanup.
 - Never lie when they don't want to reveal an answer. To a reporter, catching someone in a lie makes a better story than the truth. Always say "I don't know the answer now..." and get back with additional information later if you aren't sure about what is true or not. Put them in touch with experts to give them background or extra information.
 - Give your main message point first in a concise, positive complete sentence. For example: "We're all responsible for keeping our river clean. I've been cleaning up this river for years with my church group. It's a fun way to get involved and to serve the community."
3. Make sure all of your contact information is accurate.
 4. Keep the media informed about your Cleanup on a regular basis, e.g., before it happens so that they can help you recruit volunteers, and after it happens, when you can report on how much garbage and recycling you cleaned up.

Don'ts:

1. Fail to respond to their inquiries.
2. Fail to respect their deadlines.
3. Talk in jargon or ramble and go off on tangents.
4. Provide inaccurate or incomplete information.
5. Call them repeatedly about your Cleanup—it will just annoy them.
6. Don't send mass emails to news outlets. They are much more likely to respond if an email is addressed to them personally.

F. Putting Together A Media Plan

A good media plan will help you recruit participants, partners and sponsors, as well as call attention to the trash issue on your river and what you are doing to fix the problem. You don't have to use all the tools listed below -- choose as many as you think you can handle and the ones that will give you the most bang for the buck. Here are some pointers for designing and implementing your media plan:

1. If you schedule your Cleanup in conjunction with another major event (e.g., the GSRC and the California Coastal Cleanup), you can take advantage of publicity that is already being generated. Talk to the coordinators to find out how you can work together.
2. Distribute a media calendar announcement well in advance of the Cleanup telling "Who, What, When, Where, Why and How." In addition to your regular media list, don't forget to include the many web sites, newsletters, or high school and college newspapers and the myriad of other sites like those run by Chambers of Commerce who host "community calendars." And don't forget your partner/sponsors' websites or logos.
3. Prepare a flyer (or use the one supplied by the GSRC) explaining the Cleanup and distribute it widely. Make the "call to action" and contact information visible and easy to understand. Your distribution list should include: media outlets, libraries, public bulletin boards, chambers of commerce, schools, youth centers, businesses, public counters and places of worship.

4. Talk to your local newspaper, radio and cable television station about running public service announcements and stories several days before the event. *(See PSA samples at the end of this section.)*
5. To aid the media in preparing a story, develop fact sheets specific to the problem and solution, distribute a media release, and/or write a pitch letter with an already-written or “canned” story. *(See Press Release samples at end of section.)*
6. Send an e-mail to friends, colleagues and organization staff asking them to announce the event or program at all meetings they attend. Notify your city government officials. Obtain a proclamation from your mayor or city council. These proclamations can commemorate the day of the Cleanup and recognize all your volunteers’ efforts. *(See proclamation sample in the Appendix.)*

G. Core Materials For Your Media Plan

1. Media releases
2. Pitch letters
3. “Canned articles”
4. Letters to the editor and op-ed pieces
5. Media information kits

1. Media Releases

The purpose of a press release is to generate media coverage of an event, announcement or new development, or to provide insight or additional information about an ongoing issue, product or policy. In your case, its purpose will be to generate coverage of your Cleanup. Distributing a media release allows you to package the information, story and quotes the way you would like them covered.

For events like a River Cleanup the release is typically issued the same day as the news occurs (generally by e-mail), although you may issue it in advance of the event.

Three tips for writing a media release:

1. “Who, What, When, Where, Why and How.” This information should be in the first and second paragraph of your release. Many times, if the reporter doesn’t see the importance of the story in these paragraphs, he or she stops reading and throws it away.
2. Details. Write down the supporting key points for your core information, such as background information on littering and pollution or your watershed. Quotes from a main spokesperson can and should be used to provide or support the details.
3. Be sure to include:
 - Contact information – identify the organization issuing the release with a current contact name, phone number and e-mail address. Make sure the person will always be available and that the phone number and e-mail address are correct. You also should include your organization’s web site and/or Facebook addresses.
 - Description of your organization -- even if you only come together once a year to clean up the river – this should be standard information included as the last paragraph of any release you distribute.

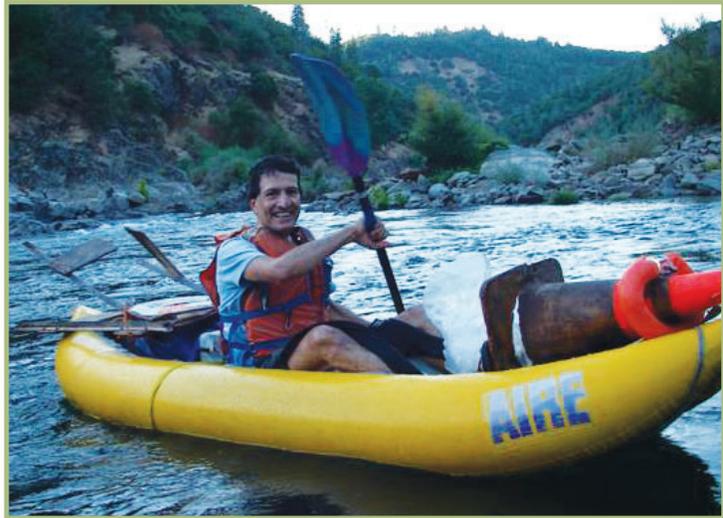
2. Pitch Letters

The purpose of a pitch letter is to explain to a reporter, editor or news director why he or she should

cover your story or address your issue. A pitch letter is not used for breaking news stories. With that in mind, you should not expect instant coverage in the next day's paper or on the evening news.

Two tips for writing a pitch letter:

1. It should make the case of how your story relates to their audience, why it is interesting or relevant and how it is newsworthy (i.e., how trash at the river is affecting recreation).
2. The pitch letter may be a follow-up to a phone conversation with a reporter and generally accompanies other written materials such as fact sheets, case studies, press releases or other program materials that serve as background information for the reporter.



3. Pre-Written or “Canned” Articles

Small local publications that don't have a large reporting staff may accept a pre-written or “canned” article and run it with little editing. In larger local publications, however, the “canned” article may be used to spur a reporter to cover your story. In this case, your pre-written article may provide the basic facts for the reporter's story, but he or she may develop their own angle. Remember weekly and monthly publications require a much longer lead-time than daily publications. Be sure to contact the publication to determine submission deadlines.

4. Letters To The Editor And Opinion-Editorial Pieces

Another way to reach opinion leaders and educate your community about your River Cleanup is to submit letters to the editor and opinion-editorial (op-ed) pieces. Op-ed pieces and letters to the editor should be written in the same fashion as a media release, with the most important information at the beginning of the letter. For maximum impact, a senior member of your organization should sign letters to the editor and op-ed articles.

Three tips for writing a letter to the editor:

1. Look up guidelines on length, deadlines and whether the letter will be edited on the paper's website. Editors will likely choose a few short letters rather than a long one. Be brief.
2. The letter should be factual. Support statements with localized statistics or facts.
3. Stick to the issue.

Opinion editorials are written to frame and position specific issues from a particular point of view, and are not a direct response to an article. However, the subject of an op-ed must be timely and of relative importance to the newspaper's readers.

Five tips for writing an op-ed piece:

1. Offer a forceful opinion – about trash and litter in your river.
2. Provide well-documented, well-researched facts and arguments.
3. Make sure your piece adds to the public's knowledge of the river and its value.
4. Provide insight on issues that are relevant to the local area.
5. Make sure the essay is clear, organized and interesting.

5. Media Information Kits

Media kits are packets of information that can be distributed at your River Cleanup, or given to a reporter to provide background information for an interview or news story. The information included should be relevant, brief and easy to scan for the main ideas. Make sure the information included in media kits is always kept current and before you hand over a kit to a reporter, reconfirm that all the information is correct, relevant and current.

Media kits can include:

- Media release
- Fact sheet on the River Cleanup
- Fact sheet on latest relevant statistics and research about the river or about pollution issues
- Photographs, electronic art of appropriate logos
- Brochures and other printed program materials like sample data collection card
- Relevant media coverage from other publications
- Current contact information, in case a reporter has a need for further information. This should include your website address, if you have one.

H. Calendar Announcements

To increase the visibility of your River Cleanup, consider submitting information for local calendar listings. Media calendar listings (also referred to as announcements or bulletin boards) are the section of the newspaper, or a time slot on radio/television where community events and activities are listed or announced. Many, many other groups now also have free community calendars on their websites. It's worth putting a little bit of work into locating these and submitting to them. Try Chambers of Commerce, colleges, free on-line newspapers, environmental organizations, and many others. To increase the likelihood of having your Cleanup included in the calendar section, send your announcement well ahead of the event.

I. Public Affairs & News Talk Shows

Equivalent to the editorial pages of a newspaper are the public affairs and talk shows on radio and television. Community-run radio and TV stations are always looking for local stories to publicize. Again, comparable to print media, your messages should be clear, concise, timely, interesting



and relevant to listeners. It helps if your representative is a well-known community leader or an expert, or include a Cleanup volunteer as a spokesperson. The first step in getting on the air is to familiarize yourself with the public affairs and news talk programs on radio and television stations in your area. Be sure to acquaint yourself with the format of the programs, noting whether they feature in-studio guests, live call-ins, panel discussions or taped programming.

J. Public Service Announcements (PSAs)

A public service announcement, or PSA, is a free message that is similar to a commercial. PSAs promote events and services of non-profit organizations and groups that serve the community. They run from 10 seconds to 30 seconds in length and appear on radio or on television. A PSA should give concise information about your Cleanup (date, time, location, contact information). Thirty seconds is usually the maximum length a radio station will run a PSA; however, call the station to obtain the station's PSA requirements, including length and lead-time. PSAs can be submitted in written format, to be read by the station's announcer, or pre-recorded on an audio or digital tape (this can be expensive and must follow the electronic needs dictated by the station). *(See PSA samples at end of section.)*



Radio PSAs

Begin by contacting the public service director at the radio stations at least six weeks before the Cleanups to find out the following information:

- Whether the station uses PSAs;
- Whether the station has written guidelines for submitting PSAs;
- What the deadline is for submitting PSAs; and
- The station's preferred length for PSAs.

Once you have determined the needs of each radio station, submit the prepared PSA to each public service director with a personalized cover letter. Always indicate the beginning and ending air-dates for your announcement in the cover letter and the PSA script itself. Follow up your mailing with a personal phone call to each public service director to make sure they have received your PSA and to ask if they will air it. If a station airs your PSA, it's always good to send a personalized thank-you letter to generate goodwill for next year's event.

Note: If you have successfully placed PSAs using other methods, by all means do what has worked for you! Many Cleanup coordinators have developed good working relationships with their local public service directors over the years as a result of placing that first PSA.

Nine tips for writing a PSA:

1. Give the radio station a choice of two or three lengths (e.g., 10 seconds, 20 seconds, 30 seconds). Make sure you accurately time your PSA, whether it is submitted in writing or pre-recorded.
2. Make sure you are providing specific and valuable information for the local listening audience.
3. Avoid extra words, particularly adjectives.

4. Close your PSA by asking people to take an action whenever possible.
5. If you submit a pre-recorded PSA, use a professional recording studio with broadcast-quality equipment. Home tape recorders aren't good enough for producing broadcast quality tapes.
6. Include the start and stop dates to air the PSA.
7. Double-space the text to allow for easy reading and editing.
8. Time the copy at a normal reading speed and include the length in seconds. Estimate read-time long rather than short.
9. If a name or word is difficult to pronounce, include a phonetic spelling.

Important reminder: Don't forget your non-English stations for all of these radio and television public affairs and public service opportunities. The ideal scenario is to send materials in the appropriate language to non-English outlets. However, if that is not possible, it is recommended you check with your respective media outlets to find out their policies pertaining to this subject.

K. Great Sierra River Cleanup Day Proclamation

Getting your Mayor, City Council member, or other local official to proclaim the Great Sierra River Cleanup Day will add prestige and visibility to your event. Describe the event, draft a proclamation or your desire for one (*please see the sample in Appendix F*), and then mail with a cover letter to the official's office. You may want to check with the official's staff - specifically his or her scheduler - to see whether you need to follow any special procedures.



Once your official has agreed to issue a proclamation, you can take advantage of a potential media opportunity by organizing an event where he/she can read the official proclamation. You may be invited to the official signing of the proclamation - this is an ideal photo opportunity. You may be able to generate media interest in the proclamation as well as the actual Cleanup. If a signing event is not feasible, you can always ask him/her to attend one of your Cleanup sites to read the official proclamation.

Having an official declaration reinforces the feeling that your volunteers are participating in something important and increases the excitement for the event. You should issue a news release and/or media advisory on the proclamation to emphasize the importance of the Cleanup and follow up with a few well-placed phone calls to your media contacts.

You could also create certificates of recognition for participating city and county officials.

L. Event Day Photographs

Be sure to designate at least one photographer to take photos of your Cleanup, but arrange for as many as you can - one at each site if possible. Action photographs are preferred. Digital images (300 dpi or better) are preferable; actual prints are the least-preferred choice. The CCD liability waiver includes a photo release, so be sure that all participants have signed this form so that you

can use their images for publicity purposes. (*Waiver is available on the SNC website beginning August 1.*)

Please email some of your best photos to us at the Sierra Nevada Conservancy. Be sure that each photo identifies the location and date of the event and the names and telephone number of the photographer for a credit line if the photo is used. If possible, identify the people in the photos.

M. Posters

Placing as many posters as possible in your community is an important part of your overall publicity campaign. Posters provide increased awareness of your event and help recruit new volunteers. Print your local event information on the GSRC or CCD poster and hang it in as many stores, schools, religious institutions, and other public places as possible.

Your Cleanup is an excellent example of the concept “think globally, act locally.” Therefore, it is helpful and important to identify your local Cleanup as part of the larger GSRC and California Coastal Cleanup Day event whenever possible. (Plus, we always appreciate the acknowledgement!) The Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) and Coastal Commission logos are available on the Coordinator’s Corner of the SNC website. There are both color and black and white versions. We would appreciate inclusion of our logos on your media outreach materials.

N. Websites And Email

The Internet provides another important medium to increase public awareness of your issue. If you have a website, include your organization’s web address on all your communication materials. This is a place to give more information about your Cleanup, photos of locations to be cleaned up and for frequently asked questions. Be sure to keep your website up-to-date by adding current information and materials regularly.



(See page 16 of this guide about how to sign volunteers up online.) Email can be a very cost-effective means to contact media. Email addresses should be researched and included on your media list, but don’t send out mass emails to the media - they won’t open them. Always send personal emails even though it takes more time.

O. Social Media Sites

Be sure to “like” the Great Sierra River Cleanup on Facebook!

There’s a huge potential for you to use social media sites like Facebook to get the word out about your River Cleanup. You can set up a Facebook Page and post the event for your River Cleanup. However, there’s also huge potential for Facebook Pages to become irrelevant, inescapable, and

annoying. Social media isn't meant for marketing. People don't want marketing messages in their Facebook news feed, but that doesn't necessarily mean they don't want any messages from organizations at all — it just means that you, as the River Cleanup, need to make sure you're getting the message right. Twitter and Instagram are also ways to gain support for the event. You can also link your Twitter and Instagram posts with your Facebook Page.

If you only use your status to announce your River Cleanup repeatedly, it'll get old really fast. People are used to their Facebook page or Twitter feeds telling them what their friends are doing and saying, not bombarding them with ads or announcements. The better you can blend in with other Facebook users, the better off you'll be, so don't think like an advertiser when you're updating your page's status!

Take advantage of the “social” part of the social network: start a conversation about your river and your Cleanup and you'll be far more likely to generate interest. You could post a comment like “I was wondering whether anyone else has noticed the amount of trash along the banks of the river this year? Where do you think it's coming from?” This can lead to a further post about when your Cleanup is and how people can help out and start a meaningful conversation about how people can help solve the trash problem.

Designate a Social Media Coordinator for your Cleanup. They can regularly post updates and photos on your sites.

P. Handling Calls From Reporters

When you get a call from a reporter working on your Cleanup, it can be tempting to answer his or her questions immediately. However, even seasoned media spokespeople can run into trouble when they try to do an interview “cold.” Instead, when a reporter calls, get as much information as possible about:

1. The news outlet (if you are not familiar with it)
2. The angle of the story he or she is working on
3. A list of questions the reporter would like answered
4. Who else has been interviewed
5. The reporter's deadline

Tell the reporter that you need this background, so that you can be sure to give him or her the most appropriate information. In some cases, after listening to the reporter's needs, you may determine that you are not the best spokesperson for the interview, or that another person like a teacher who will be bringing their class to the Cleanup will be a better interviewee. Make sure you (or the designated spokesperson) calls the reporter back well before the deadline with the information they requested. Before returning the call, take time to organize your key messages and practice saying them. Pull together pertinent facts and figures (for instance, figures on how much trash you pulled out of the river last year), so that you have them in front of you when you do the interview. If the reporter has questions you cannot answer, or if you need more time to gather information, call the reporter back well before the deadline and tell them.

Q. Timeline To Cleanup

Two Weeks Before Your Cleanup

The two weeks leading up to your Cleanup are critical for publicity. Call reporters from your top three to five news markets (television, radio, and print) to be sure they know about the event and to see if they need more information. Issuing a media advisory of the event can be helpful in alerting the media and the public. Invite them to come to a Cleanup site as a participant or to cover the event for their news outlets. Remember that your job is to be a news “salesperson,” convincing reporters that this is an important community activity they should cover.

It is helpful to suggest possible story angles to reporters. Try to think of several different suggestions that could provide an interesting story. Often a reporter will write a story if you provide ideas and work with him/her on getting the necessary background information and interviews. For example, you might suggest:

- An article on the local trash problems and their impact on the community;
- an article on the types of trash found (e.g., unusual items);
- a “human interest” story on a participant or group of participants;
- costs to clean up litter during the year; and
- recycling efforts in your community.



News Angles to Use with Local Media

- **Peculiar Trash Items:** You can provide a list of the top 10 peculiar items. Based on those items, you could hypothesize on the point of origin and how they ended up at the river.
- **Local “People, Pounds, and Miles” lists:** You can compare your state or regional “People, Pounds, and Miles” totals to national or international data.
- **Journey of Trash:** “Follow” a piece of trash from the river to the sea.
- **Survey: Interview “Everyman/Woman”** - outside their place of business or the restaurant they just exited - about where they think the water (and pollutants and trash) that flows into the storm drain in the street ends up. Do they understand that it ends up in the creek or river?
- **Looking Back Over the Years:** You can discuss the trends of your local Cleanup data over as many years as you have participated.
- **Youth Volunteers:** As a result of the youth recruiting you have done at the local schools, pitch reporters on the increasing (if this is the case) number of high school students devoting their community service hours to cleaning up the river.

- **The Great Sierra River Cleanup Challenge:** This is more of a marketing angle, but would get press simply because of local celebrity involvement. Two local DJs (morning v. evening) get teams and have a contest in which they involve their listeners and see who can pick up the most trash (prizes involved; good community awareness for radio station).
- **Low Water Levels:** uncovering previously hidden trash: this can apply in some years.

On the Day of Your Cleanup

On the day of your Cleanup, you should be prepared to make it as easy as possible for the news media to cover your event. Don't forget to:

- assign your publicity coordinator or a reliable volunteer to greet the media, set up interviews, and answer reporters' questions;
- collect reporters' business cards so you can contact them next year;
- introduce the media to any dignitaries attending your Cleanup;
- give reporters contact names and numbers for follow-up calls; and
- provide any background information. (It may be helpful to have some press packets that include printed background information and fact sheets at the ready.)

After the Cleanup is Over

As soon as possible after your Cleanup, compile a brief written report on your publicity efforts.

Include in this report:

- the names of all newspapers, magazines, newsletters, and radio and television stations that covered your event. If possible, copy any clippings you might have and send them along to the Sierra Nevada Conservancy;
- the names of specific reporters who were especially helpful in publicizing your event and their contact information (any business cards you collect will come in handy here);
- the things that went well and those that could be improved in your next publicity campaign; and
- your recommendations for next year's publicity efforts.

Write a personal note of thanks to the reporters and public service directors who helped publicize the event. This will help pave the way for stronger, closer working relationships with reporters in future years.