

The Medical Cannabis Advocate's Handbook

MEDIA 101

*A barking dog is often more useful
than a sleeping lion.*

—Washington Irving

MEDIA 101

Local and national media coverage is an important part of informing our communities, opinion leaders, and potential allies about cannabis therapeutics and the challenges that patients, providers, researchers and doctors face. Patients and advocates must often take the news to print, broadcast, and online media outlets to be sure our voices are heard. As an advocate, you have an important role in shaping how news about medical cannabis is reported - and how it is received by the public-at-large.



The purpose of this section is to help you better understand the types of media and how to communicate with them. Media outreach is an important part of any strategic plan but media attention can be a double-edged sword. It can be our best tool for educating and influencing the public. Sometimes, however, it can be an obstacle in the struggle to defend medical cannabis and protect patients. Visit the Strategic Messaging and Talking to the Media sections of this handbook before contacting the media.

DEFINE YOUR MEDIA AUDIENCES

We can most effectively focus our media outreach by identifying those media outlets which most widely reach the general public. In other words, we need to pose the question, "Where do most people get their news?" Secondly, we need to focus our efforts on

being featured in those media outlets that already reach out to those readers, viewers, and listeners we've defined as being part of our targeted audiences.

A. BROADCAST MEDIA

Television is America's primary source of news and information. Public opinion polls show that more than 69% of Americans identify television as their main source of news and 53% consider television to be the most believable and credible news source. More than 92 million US households or 98% of all homes own television sets (more homes than have indoor plumbing or even telephones). Between the ages of 2 and 65, the average person will watch nine full years of television.

Radio is cited as a news source by 14% percent of Americans, according to the same poll. There are approximately 533 million radio sets in the U.S.; 74% are in homes and 26% are outside the home, predominantly in cars. The radio industry is diversified and targets audiences very specifically according to music tastes and creates programming accordingly. A majority of local radio stations have regular news segments as well as talk radio programming throughout the day. Radio stations can be useful media outlets as they respond quickly to emerging local or national issues or trends.

B. PRINT MEDIA

Newspapers are increasingly becoming "the media of elites." According to the same poll, 37% of Americans cite this as another source of their news. Approximately 1,500 daily newspapers are published in the U.S., with a total circulation of 56.9 million readers. Although increased competition, particularly from television, has eroded some of newspapers' influence, they remain a powerful force in the mass media. Newspapers are important tar-



gets for reaching public opinion leaders who are seeking in-depth coverage of issues and trends. They are also the most local of media outlets. Although more than half of newspapers are owned by large corporations headquartered outside their circulation area, coverage of local events is usually the focus of local newspapers.

Magazines target very specific readerships. Only a few are geared for a general audience; more typically, magazines target a specific group of people or focuses on a single interest or hobby. The same poll revealed that only 5% of Americans rely on magazines as a source for the latest news and information. However, magazines and newsletters that target members of the medical community, patients or family members of patients, policymakers, law enforcement communities and social justice activists can be extremely effective targets.

C. ON-LINE MEDIA

Web-publications more and more influence the way news is delivered. For example, newspaper articles and television and radio broadcasts are often subsequently or simultaneously posted on that media outlet's Web site. In addition, there are many entirely web-based publications that are interested in covering issues considered too controversial by more mainstream media. Clearly, this kind of "echoing" trend in the media, and the growth of independent and social media, offers even more opportunities to educate the public and policymakers about our issues. The face of Media will continue to change in the coming years. Dramatic changes will occur in journalism as technologies merge TV transmissions, phone sys-

tems, and personal computing into one system. We will need to reevaluate its approach to targeting both online and off-line media outlet as these changes occur.

Blogs, derived from "web log", are user-generated website where entries are made in journal style. Blogs often provide commentary or news on a particular subject, such as food, politics, or local news; some function as more personal online diaries. Blogs have been responsible for shaping what news gets covered by other media outlets, and offer a choir of commentary. Refer to and comment on ASA's blog here: AmericansForSafeAccess.org/blog.

Social Media has been able to connect literally millions of people through on-line activity and dissemination of information. Social Media platforms like Facebook and Twitter have gained a substantial following that allows for easier and more direct communication with people who care about our issues. It is important that ASA utilize these avenues of communication whenever possible to advance our goals. Follow ASA on Facebook: www.facebook.com/AmericansforSafeAccess, and Twitter: twitter.com/SafeAccess.



MAKING A PRESS LIST

What is a press list?

A media list is a list of the phone numbers, fax numbers and e-mail addresses of your local media outlets, reporters, editors and producers. Your press list can be as general or as specific as you want to make it.

HOW TO MAKE A PRESS LIST

1. The Basics

Find general contact information for all of your local press outlets including: daily newspapers, weekly community newspapers, magazines, televi-

sion stations, and radio stations.

Then call each of the news organizations on your list to ask for the number, fax number, and e-mail address of the news desk or assignment desk. (You may want to ask if they prefer e-mail or faxes). This will be the core of your press list.

2. Customizing your list

Call each of the news organizations on your list ask for the names and direct phone numbers of the news editor, medical or health reporter, legal reporters, and feature editor (you may just want to ask the assignment desk who covers medical cannabis.) Call each of these individuals directly and ask if they would be interested in receiving news about medical cannabis issues and get their complete contact information.

Read your local newspapers and watch your local news stations to see if there is a reporter who might be interested in medical cannabis stories or a specific health show that may want to do a segment about medical cannabis. These and others would be among your target media.

Keep a list of people who write stories about medical cannabis, they are more likely than others to write another story.

3. Keep it current

Make sure to update incorrect information on your list. Continue to add new reporters who write about medical cannabis and relevant issues to your list.

CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION

Now that you know who you are contacting with your press list, it is time to learn how reporters like to be contacted.

PRESS RELEASE BASICS

Getting Started. Using 8½ x 14 or 8½ x 11 paper, put the organization's name, address, and phone number on the top left, and the words "Press Release," or "Media Release" on the top right. Then type "For Release:

Immediate" or "For Release: Date." on the left. On the right, across from the "For Release" information, type "Contact:" and then the names of the people who will be available to answer questions from the media. Their phone numbers should be included under their names.

The Slug. The headline on the release is called the slug. The slug should very briefly summarize the topic of the release and utilize action verbs to sound as interesting and as newsworthy as possible.

The Inverted Triangle. The inverted triangle means that the first paragraph should contain the most important information; the next paragraph should contain less important information, and so on, until the last part of the release is the least important. It should be possible to cut off the bottom half of the release and still provide journalists with sufficient information.

The Lead. The lead is the first sentence or paragraph of a press release. It should contain what is known as the five w's: who, what, where, when and why.

Style. Keep the release succinct—you should rarely go over one page. Always type a release and use wide margins. Double space the release, or at least leave spaces between paragraphs. Keep paragraphs and sentences short. Use exact dates whenever possible.

Objectivity. Press releases are designed to transmit facts. Opinions should not be included unless they are clearly identified as such. One way to convey opinion is by including a quote from someone in your group. Make certain that the quote is clearly attributed.

Closing Symbols. At the end of a release, you must indicate to journalists that the release is over. Type "-30-" or "###" at the bottom center of the last page and MORE at the bottom of any page that is not your last page.

E-Mail Press Releases

- Use plain ASCII text. Never send press releases as attachments to email. Never

email a press release with a blank subject line.

- Use hyper-links where appropriate. If there is additional information available on your website, include a hyper-link.
- Send a test message before distributing your press release. Always send a copy of the press release to yourself or to a colleague before distributing it. Check the formatting and test URLs.
- Avoid disclosing the recipients' email addresses. Always type the recipients' addresses in the "Bcc" field of your email message header, rather than in the "To" or "Cc" field.
- Post your organization's media contact information on the home page of your Web site. Be sure to keep the contact information up-to-date, and include information on how reporters can be added to your mailing list.

What makes a press release effective:

Emphasize what's new about your action. Reporters have already seen medical cannabis patients protesting DEA Raids; think about how your action or event is different.

When to send press releases: The most critical press release is the one that goes out about two days before the event. But it's a good idea to put one out about ten days prior to the event so that when the journalists get the second one they should be ready to respond to it.

It's also important to send out a third one the moment the action begins, and its overkill to send out a fourth press release saying how it all went. If the action lasts longer than one day, send out a new press release every day, as long as have something new to say.

PITCHING REPORTERS

The following tips are for orally pitching stories to reporters. Although the following tips are for soliciting immediate coverage, much of this advice applies to building on-going relations with reporters over the phone. Whether you are calling for an event, or calling to fol-

low up on materials you sent to a reporter, you will want to consider the following:

To the point. If you don't know the reporter, you will have less than 30 seconds to get his/her attention. Get to the point quickly. Answer the question: "Why should this reporter be interested?" and tailor your pitch accordingly. For example, look into regional angles, the public health or the science angles of a story as opposed to a straight "patient vs." pitch.

Practice. Before calling the media, write out and practice your pitch on someone who is not a member of your organization to see if they understand what you are saying and think it is interesting.

Respect Deadlines. Media calls are best made in the morning or early afternoon when most reporters are not on deadline. Always ask if the reporter is on deadline before you begin. If they are, ask when a better time would be to call. Exceptions to the rule are radio and TV talk shows. Call when the show is not on the air.

Be Direct. Tell the reporter why you are calling—"I saw your story on... and thought you might be interested in something my organization is doing about this problem,"

Be Ready. Have your talking points and the appropriate information in front of you, including statistics and spokesperson information so you don't sound disorganized. Be specific.

Relate. Tie the story to something timely or newsworthy.

Truth. If you don't know the answer to a question the reporter raises, tell them that you do not know but that you will try and find out for them and call back. Don't make up answers or speak off the cuff. Anything you say is on the record so choose your words carefully. Say something like, "I'm not sure about that. Is it alright if I find out and call you back?"

Be Flexible. If a reporter is on deadline and

is brusque, don't let that shake you. It is essential in this situation that you respond courteously to their situation by offering to call back, ask when would be the best time to call back, find out if you can fax the information, etc. Others may be brusque even when not on deadline. Don't take it personally.

Your Info. Offer to provide additional information and background materials. These should expand the portrait of your organization and its activities, as well as the positive role played by the entire sector.

Their Info. If the reporter asks you to fax something, confirm their fax number. Many organizations change their fax numbers frequently. Follow up with a fax immediately.

Follow Up. When not working on a same-day press briefing, make a commitment for the next step: set up an interview, send/fax follow-up materials, call the reporter back with more information after a certain time period, etc.

Try and Retry. Share what is working about your media "pitch"—and what isn't working—with your colleagues. It may take a couple of calls to get your pitch down, and when you find what works, share it.

Know Your Stuff. Be prepared to have conversations with reporters who know a lot about the issue. If you finish your 30 second pitch and cannot answer reporters' inquiries, you won't be able to sell your story. Reporters want to be sure you know what you are talking about. Remember that your pitch should be simple, interesting, short and clear. But, your knowledge should go to a deeper level.

Track it. Keep a log with good notes about your press outreach. Record reporters' interests, key questions; note what the next steps are. Does the reporter want more information? Do you need to make a follow-up call in a few days? Record any follow-up activities on the log.

Abort? Retry? Fail? If a reporter says no,

respect it. Do not keep harping or bothering him/her about the same story or angle. No doesn't mean "don't ever call me again." It just means don't call again with the same pitch/story. Don't be afraid to call another time with a new story, a very interesting new angle, breaking news, etc.

FIELDING INCOMING CALLS

When receiving press calls, make sure anyone who may answer the phone is prepared to take careful messages. Get the name, number and organization calling, as well as their deadline. If you do not have the information right in front of you, do not hesitate to ask the reporter if you can call right back with some answers, someone to talk to, etc. Always remember: an imminent deadline should receive an immediate call back from the appropriate spokesperson.

Also, when receiving calls, you may have the opportunity to try a new angle, or tell the longer story to further interest a reporter, or to get them to cover your side of the story more in-depth. Other reporters may call you looking for information to write a story when they are unable to attend.

LEAVING MESSAGES

Reporters are hardly ever at their desks—although your chances are best in the morning. Don't hesitate to leave brief messages for reporters outlining your pitch. You can do this more than once, but try not to leave more than two messages. Try to keep your pitch very short, ask them to call, offer to fax info, and say that you will call back. If you wait until you get every single reporter on the phone before giving your pitch, you may face an empty press event

(Adapted from Green Media Tool Shed <http://www.greenmediatoolshed.org/>)

CREATING MEDIA EVENTS

Several factors should help you determine what media event is most appropriate. Press breakfasts or luncheons are more appropriate for non-breaking news, whereas a press con-





ference may be more suitable for breaking and urgent news. You should also consider your financial and human resource constraints when deciding the

details of a press event. Timing is another important factor to consider. It is important to work with reporter deadlines when deciding the details of a press event.

IDENTIFY YOUR EXPECTATIONS

It is important to ask yourself what you expect to get out of the media event. Set goals. How many reporters do you want at your event? How many stories would you like to have written? Clear goals will help you appropriately design your media event.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT TYPE OF EVENT

Press Conferences should only be used for breaking news. Breaking news may include the release of a report, an event, a reaction to another story or event, or other issues of immediate interest to the public.

Press Briefings are designed to provide greater background information and question-answer sessions for reporters.

Tele-Conference is a much less resource-intensive press event. Tele-Conferences can be used for breaking news when reporters are outside the local area.

Interview: A phone interview or in-person interview may be an alternative to conference calls if you wish to work with an individual reporter who is locally accessible.

Preparedness. Whichever press event you select, you should be prepared with in-depth knowledge on the event and the issues.

Press Packets are useful for providing background information, such as the history of your organization, staff biographies, and any other background information that a reporter may need for a story.

Planning press events will help you determine which event to choose, who your

spokesperson should be, timing, and what information you need to firmly backup your position and story.

(Adapted from Green Media Tool Shed <http://www.greenmediatoolshed.org/>)

GETTING YOUR MESSAGE COVERED

MAKE IT RELEVANT:

Understanding News Hooks

To really grab a reporter's attention, your story must be newsworthy. This list of news hooks can spice up your story and help you score press. Which of these hooks apply to your story?

- a. Controversy sells stories. Frame the controversy to put the opposition on the defense.
- b. Dramatic Human Interest. Include the stories of real people, their triumphs, tragedies, adventures and anecdotes.
- c. Trends. Stories that suggest new opinions, behavior patterns and attitudes. There is a trend; find at least 3 examples to assert that a new trend is emerging.
- d. Timeline/calendar. Captures something coming up on the calendar. "Back to school" can be a hook for toxic pollution in your children's schools. Mother's Day can be a hook for a new breast cancer community hot line.
- e. New Announcement. "Unprecedented" or "groundbreaking" or "first-ever". Reporters are only interested in new news, not old news. Make your news fresh.
- f. Localize National Story (and vice versa). Take a nationally breaking story and emphasize its local impact, i.e., how a welfare reform bill is affecting people living in your community.
- g. Anniversaries/Milestones. One year later, one decade later.
- h. Fresh angle on old story. Take an old story and put a fresh twist on it.
- i. Profiles and Personnel may feature individuals, community leaders, or

galvanizing spokespersons who may become news themselves because of their fascinating stories.

- j. Special Event. A huge conference, rally or gathering. Frame event to capture the issue and importance.
- k. Respond and React to news others make.
- l. Celebrity. If you have a nationally known celebrity on your side, make sure they are included in the story.
- m. Strange Bedfellows. Have unlikely allies come together in solidarity over your issue? Highlight it in your story.

Making a Newsworthy Event and Photo

First and foremost, always find ways to visualize your news. Like it or not: If there's no picture, there's no image. If there's no image, than there's no television or newspaper photographers. If there's no television, then you lose thousands if not millions of audience members seeing your message. Television in particular needs pictures. So instead of just presenting talking heads in suits, behind podiums, beneath bad fluorescent lights, in boring office suites, create photo ops for your news.

Stage the photo op with the message in mind. Visualize how everything will come together and look in tonight's TV news or tomorrow's paper. How will the viewer get the one key message that drives home your point? Find the one visual metaphor that communicates the message. Think about your news hooks! All of the elements that make your story newsworthy should be considered as you design your photo op.

Build your event carefully so photographers don't have an opportunity to capture an image you'd rather not see on the front page of tomorrow's paper.

Think about the pictures that help tell your story, and then build that picture, thinking through all the details, including:

Background: Your location should be appropriate, convenient, should help tell your story. Be mindful of camera angles, the direction of

the sun and the effect on lighting at outdoor events. Do not make camera people shoot directly in to the sun. Also, does the backdrop "read" in your picture? In other words, can you make sense of it? One hapless group in Washington, DC staged their photo op right at the base of the Washington Monument -- not in front of the monument, at the base of the structure. All you could see was some marble thing behind them. The inspiring structure they had desired was out of the picture because they were too close!



People: The messenger is as important as the message. Think about your spokespeople and the other key players at your event. Are all the right people represented? Will members of your target audience see people who they will find credible when they see your story on the six o'clock news? Will they see people who look like them?

Typical speakers at your event might include:

- a key organization representative, like you!
- a person who represents the human interest inherent in your story like a patient, their families or local resident
- a local politician, ally or public official
- an expert, such as a doctor, scientist or lawyer who can present the "raw facts" of your issue

Props: What are the visual elements and gimmicks that flesh out your story? It might be a costume, a toy, a cardboard cut out of some symbol or your issue. The perfect prop is often the crowning glory or your photo op.

Sound bite

What you are saying at your event is, of course, as important as what your event looks like, so be sure that your sound bite is consistent with your theme and communicates a consistent message. Does your visual



metaphor hinge on a common phrase or cliché? Put it to work in your sound bite!

For example, Americans for Safe Access in

Washington, DC staged a photo op to highlight patients "who face the threat of arrest every day just to get the medicine that their doctors prescribe". Each person at the event wore a sign around their neck with a picture of a medical marijuana patient noting their name and medical condition.

WRITING EFFECTIVE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters to the editor are an easy way to voice your opinion to policy makers and to educate people in your community about the issues your organization addresses. You can use letters to correct or interpret facts in response to an inaccurate or biased article recently published in a newspaper or magazine; to explain the connection between a news item and your organization's issues; or to praise or criticize a recent article or editorial. Whatever your purpose, your letter will reach many people in your community - without exception, the letters section is one of the most highly read segments of newspapers (and magazines).

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Step 1: Know Your Paper's Policy

Find out the newspaper's (or magazine's) policy for printing letters. Some have requirements for length of letters, some want letters to be typewritten, and almost all require that you include your name, address and phone number. (Of course your address and phone number would never be printed. Most publications will want to call you before they print your letter to confirm that you really did write the letter and that you want to have it published.)

If the paper doesn't publish its letters requirements next to the letters it prints, don't be afraid to call. Ask to whom you should

address your letter, if they have any length restrictions, and in what format they would like the letter.

Step 2: Be Timely

Responding to a recent article, editorial or op-ed is one of the best ways to increase your chances of getting published. (Be sure to mention the name of the article and the date it was written in the beginning of your letter.) You can also capitalize on recent news, events, or anniversaries.

Step 3: Keep it Simple

You already know how to write letters to policy makers that are concise, informative and personal. The same should be true with letters to the editor. Make your first sentence short, compelling and catchy. Don't be afraid to be direct, engaging, and even controversial. Keep your points short and clear, stick to one subject, and, as a general rule, try to limit your letters to under three or four paragraphs in length. Most publications ask that letters be kept to 250 words or less. The shorter the letter, the better its chances of being printed.

Step 4: Get Personal

Newspapers, at their core, are community entities. Editors will be much more likely to publish a letter, and the letter will have much more impact, if it demonstrates local relevance.

Use local statistics. For example, a letter focusing on a vote on the Clean Water Act should point out how many rivers and lakes are unsafe for swimming in your community or state.

Use personal stories. For example, if you or someone in your family has become ill because of contaminated drinking water, you should talk about your experience in a letter to the editor addressing the Safe Drinking Water Act.

Use names. As congressional aides have repeatedly told us, if a letter to the editor mentions a Representative or Senator's name, they will see it. They care about how they are

being perceived in the district, and they will pay attention to a letter that asks them to co-sponsor legislation, or to take a specific action in Congress. You should also urge your readers to support your position and to let their elected officials know their views.

Use your credentials. If you have expertise in the area you are writing about, say it!

Step 5: Increase Name Recognition

Letters to the editor are an excellent opportunity to let more people know about your issue. As a general rule, you should sign your letter to the editor with your affiliation. On the other hand, if you and many other representatives from your organization are writing letters to the editor as part of a targeted campaign, you may not want to include your affiliation. Publications will not print letters they think are part of a manufactured campaign.

If you are the only one writing to the editor, you may also want to work your organization's name into the text of your letter. For example, in a letter about food safety standards you could say that, "The (your organization) recommended guidelines for improving food safety standards to protect our children just last year."

Step 6: Don't Forget the Follow-up

Don't be discouraged if your letter is not printed. Keep trying. You can even submit a revised letter with a different angle on the issue at a later date. And if your letter is published, be sure to send the clipped version to your member of Congress as well! While your representative or senator will probably have clipped your letter, it carries more weight if it comes from you with a personal note attached.

Step 7: Think Strategically

You should think about letters to the editor as a regular strategic campaign tool to increase the effectiveness of your organization's actions. Try to target several different papers in your area at the same time and encourage people to explore different angles

on the same issue. However, do not send the exact same letter to more than one newspaper in the same market. If you want to be published in more than one paper in the same market, rewrite the letter slightly or choose a different angle to approach the subject at each publication. Newspapers do not like to print "form" letters.

"It is especially good if the letters are geographically spread and the issue is repeated in a few areas. It creates a ripple effect. It shows that the issue has reached far into the congressional district which, in turn, gets noticed by the policy maker." - Congressional Aide

(Adapted from Green Media Tool Shed)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

PRESS EVENT CHECKLIST

Before Your Press Event

1. Pick a location. Choose a setting for your press conference that will accommodate as many reporters and observers as you expect. Of course, you may not always know how many people are coming—so leave some margin for error. It is always best to have speakers elevated on steps or a platform so that they are visible to everyone. Reporters will bring their own equipment, but having a PA system is always helpful. Be conscious of the ambient noise. Try to stay away from busy streets if your press conference is outdoors. You may want to consider a location that is meaningful—i.e. a courthouse where someone is on trial, the location of a recent bust, the home of a newsmaker. Remember you must have permission to conduct a press conference on private property or in government buildings.

2. Assign tasks. Think ahead about what needs to be done and delegate the tasks well in advance. Someone will have to get permission to use a certain site for the event. Someone will have to invite media, print press materials, and set up the physical location. Someone needs to call speakers and get commitments. Some formal press conferences

often have refreshments. Do not wait until the last minute to make a task list and assign duties. It will save you some unnecessary stress and make your event seem much more professional.

3. Line up speakers. Who is going to talk to the media? Generally, you want primary sources at your press conference. Primary sources are the people who are actually making the news—patients in trouble; researchers announcing a breakthrough, local politicians support the issue, lawyers defending patients, etc. Whether or not you have a primary source, ask yourself why the media will listen to the speaker. Are they well known, sympathetic, an authority on the topic? Call the speakers well in advance to get a commitment. It is also a good idea to send a confirmation letter or email specifying exactly when and where the speaker should be for the conference. Have them come early to avoid delays!

4. Create background materials. Do not assume that the media knows the background for the press conference. Have some printed materials ready to fill them in on medical cannabis in general and the specific reason for the press conference. If your press conference is concerning a patient on trial, for example, have brief information on medical cannabis and the defendant's personal story. This will help the reporters in preparing the story and greatly increase the chances of being covered. Check the ASA website for general medical cannabis background material. Remember to keep it short—one or two pages.

5. Create visuals. Having an interesting visual presentation makes a press conference more effective and memorable. It also increases the chance of photographic and television coverage. Consider the backdrop of your event. Is there a landmark building or monument? You may also want to make signs, banners, or puppets to communicate something visually to the media. Or have everyone wear the same color shirt or have similar messages on your shirts. You only have a few seconds to

make an impact. You can also use the podium as a place to put your organization's logo and website.

6. Write and send a press release. The press release is the usual way that media outlets get news. See the sample press release for guidance. Keep it very short. You are only trying to get their attention, not tell the whole story. Be sure to include the nuts and bolts information: date, place, time, speakers, and who to call for more information. Many press releases are faxed to news outlets, but email is also acceptable. Send the press release a few days before the event, and again the day of the event.

7. Make pitch calls. You will want to call everyone you sent a press release to and ask them to attend. This is a crucial step because reporters get numerous unsolicited press releases each week. Be prepared to offer a little more information about the topic, why it is important, and who will be speaking. Get the name, telephone number, and email of the reporter who will attend if possible. That way, you can follow up afterwards if needed.

8. Make press packs. Neatly print your press release, background materials, and other materials (relevant flyers, brochures, or supporting documents). Put a copy of each item in a folder with your business card or contact information. You will want to have enough copies for every reporter, so make a few extra.

DAY OF THE PRESS EVENT

1. Resend the press release. Send the press release to everyone again early in the day (or the night before for a morning event). Daily news assignment can vary, and you want to be at the top of the list.

2. Make more pitch calls. If time permits, you should call everyone who receives a press release again on the day of the press conference. If you do not have time to call everyone again, focus on those who you want there most or those who were most enthusiastic.

3. Set the stage. Set up your room or outside area for good visibility. Have the speakers in a prominent place. Set up tables and chairs if necessary. Have someone standing by the entrance or in a prominent place to greet the press. A nametag is a good way to identify this person. Assemble the speakers early so you are ready to go on time and there are no surprises.

4. Identify and greet the press. You should designate a media liaison to welcome reporters as they arrive and distribute press packs. This person can also let reporters know where to set up cameras and microphones and when the speaking will begin. The liaison should also collect business cards or contact information from each reporter. This is normal; so do not be reluctant to ask. You will use this information to build your press list for follow up or future events.

5. Let the MC take charge. The MC ("master of ceremonies") will conduct the press conference and introduce speakers. The MC should be confident, friendly, and able to keep the pace going and in order. The MC must also keep the reporters in line. If questions are to be answered at the end of the press conference, do not allow reporters to interrupt speakers. Politely decline to answer the question and remind them that there will be a time for questions later.

6. Q & A. The MC should recognize reporters individually for questions. Allow the appropriate speaker to answer the question before taking another. Do not be intimidated if more than one reporter is trying to get your attention at the same time. Try saying something like, "I'll take you first, and then you will be next." Decide in advance if you will take all questions, or allow a fixed amount of time for questions. You can always invite reporters and speakers to speak informally after the press conference is closed. Be sure to thank the speakers and the press for attending.

FOLLOW UP

1. Watch or read the coverage. You will want to see if and how your event is covered. Make note of which outlets carry your story. Those will be your hot prospects for future events. You may also identify "hostile" outlets with bad coverage. You should send a thank you note to a reporter who does a particularly good job. Likewise, you may want to send a correction if someone's coverage is inaccurate or biased. Be sure to note how the event looks in pictures and television. You can make improvements next time if you see something you do not like.

2. Make your press list. Now that you have collected contact information, make a list of every reporter who attended. Add notes about anyone who was very supportive or enthusiastic. Keep this list for future use.

SAMPLE LETTER TO THE EDITOR

MEDICAL MARIJUANA WAS EFFECTIVE FOR HER

Los Angeles Times—Nov 04, 2002

I was so pleased to read that doctors can no longer be held accountable for suggesting marijuana use to patients when needed ("Medical Pot Use Given a Boost," Oct. 30). I just finished a year of treatments for breast cancer. While in chemotherapy treatment, nothing could control my severe nausea and vomiting. I was prescribed the so-called best prescription drug: Zofran. I even had it in IV form. After being so weak from vomiting that I didn't have enough strength to crawl back into bed, I tried marijuana following my fourth chemo treatment.

The symptoms were gone instantly.

The marijuana was the only thing that kept me symptom-free. It was a miracle drug for me. I don't condone drug use, but feel that medical marijuana is better than the very expensive and synthetic alternatives in many medical cases.

-Allyson Santucci,
Palm Desert

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Medical Marijuana Patients Win Big as Court Upholds State Law

Judge Sides with ASA, ACLU and Drug Policy Alliance in Saying California Can Protect Patients

SAN DIEGO—A San Diego Superior Court today handed a critical victory to medical marijuana patients nationwide, affirming the ability of states to exempt qualified patients from criminal penalties, despite federal policy that prohibits all marijuana use. Following oral arguments by AG and defendants, the court confirmed the validity of California's medical marijuana laws, rejecting the contention of several counties—San Diego, San Bernardino and Merced—that such laws are made invalid by federal law.

"The judge agreed with us that there is no real conflict between federal and state law, and that the state's voluntary ID cards program does not interfere with the purpose of Prop. 215," said Joe Elford, chief counsel for Americans for Safe Access (ASA). "This ruling upholds both the will of the voters and the legislature's attempt to help implement it. The protections provided to patients under state law have been confirmed."

Enacted in 1996, the Compassionate Use Act, also known as Proposition 215, allows qualified patients with a doctor's recommendation to use medical marijuana. The Medical Marijuana Program Act, passed in 2003, requires counties to implement an identification card program that allows law enforcement to properly identify legitimate patients.

The California Attorney General's office argued in parallel with ASA, the ACLU, and the Drug Policy Alliance (DPA) that state medical marijuana laws are not rendered invalid by conflicting federal statutes—consistent with the opinions of the attorneys general of several other states, including Colorado, Hawaii and Oregon, which permit medical use of marijuana.

The case originated from a lawsuit initially brought by San Diego County, and later joined by San Bernardino and Merced counties, against the state of California. ASA, the ACLU and DPA intervened in the proceedings on behalf of medical marijuana patients and their caregivers and doctors in order to assure adequate representation of those most impacted by the case.

These groups represented Pamela Sakuda, a patient who passed away after the lawsuit was filed, as well as Sakuda's spouse and caregiver, Norbert Litzinger and Dr. Stephen O'Brien, a physician who specializes in HIV/AIDS treatment in Oakland, California, and believes that many of his seriously ill patients benefit from the medical use of marijuana as well as several other local patients.

"For the tens of thousands of seriously ill Californians who depend on medical marijuana, this victory could not be more significant," said Steph Sherer, ASA's executive director. "San Diego Supervisor Bill Horn stated he was seeking clarification from the courts. Now that the court has ruled, we hope that San Diego and counties across California will move forward with implementing state law."

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With more than 30,000 active members with chapters and affiliates in more than 40 states, Americans for Safe Access is the largest national member-based organization of patients, medical professionals, scientists and concerned citizens promoting safe and legal access to cannabis for therapeutic uses and research.