

September 2020

This is an internal document for STEPP grantees only.

Guide for Using Earned Media in Your Local Community

Using earned media can be a very effective way to raise awareness about the issue of youth vaping in your community. Because of this, CDPHE put together a customizable media release and op-ed that you can send out to your local media outlets to garner local media attention around this important issue.

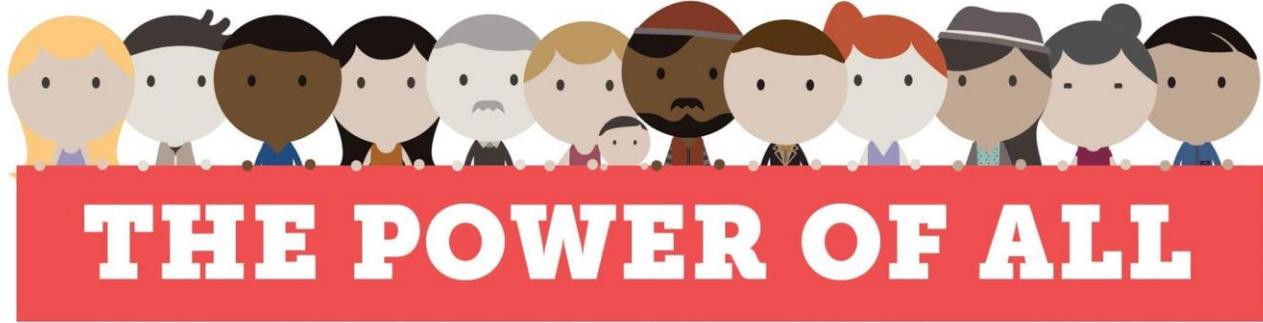
Below, we provide tips and best practices for successfully pitching the release and/or op-ed.

If you have questions or need assistance, contact SE2, STEPP's communications technical assistance provider, at TA@se2communications.com.

Customizing Your Media Outreach

- First, ensure your media release and/or op-ed is properly customized for your community. All customizable pieces have been highlighted in yellow to draw attention to where you need to fill in your local information.
- Make sure that the person you include as your media contact is readily available to answer media inquiries, even outside of business hours. Include their cell phone number, if possible.
- If there are local events, such as community meetings where you will discuss youth vaping, include that information in your media outreach.
- For the op-ed, find someone to be the signer. This could be a local health official or doctor, school administrator or teacher, parent or other influential community member. Encourage them to personalize it to reflect their unique perspectives. You may need a digital headshot of the author to run with it.

Building Your Media Contact List



- For the media release, start by making a list of all media outlets (newspaper, TV, radio, online only) that cover your community. Then look online to find an email contact address for each outlet.
 - Most local news outlets have a general email address for their assignment desk (e.g., newsroom@denverpost.com). If you can't find it online, you can call the office number and they should be able to provide you with an email address.
- Then create a list of reporters, editors, producers, assignment desks, etc. from these local news outlets and publications. You may find these online by looking at the "Contact Us" page or linked from a reporter's byline in an article.
- Note: If you live in a smaller community, there may only be one or two contacts at each outlet.
- Pay special attention to reporters who have written/reported on stories about health, teens or local schools, and collect their contact information.
- Remember, it is okay – and actually a good thing – to send your press release to more than one person at each outlet. From one outlet, you may have contact information for the general newsroom, reporter(s) who have covered similar topics and/or the assignment editor.
- For the op-ed, look for a section titled something along the lines of "Opinion" or "Editorial". Once on this page, you may find a button, a form field or an email address to submit an op-ed or editorial. Collect the email address or page links to save for when you are ready to submit the op-ed.

Conducting Media Outreach

- First, copy the content of the press release or op-ed into an email. Do not attach it as a Word document or PDF. (Most reporters will not open attachments.)
 - For the op-ed, note the media outlet's word limit, which may range from 600-800 words. In a form field, it may count the words for you, but if you email it, you may need to use the word count feature in Microsoft Word or Google Docs to double check that



your op-ed is within the limit. If you can't find this information online, call or email the outlet.

- If it must be emailed, have the signer of the op-ed send the email. If submissions are through a form on the website, you can submit it on the signer's behalf. Of course, make sure the signer has approved the final draft and knows you will be sharing it on their behalf. You'll also want to make sure you have a digital photo of the author if the outlet wants that.
- Make sure to include a subject line! This is the most important piece in the entire email, as it is what will hopefully draw a reporter or editor to open your email. You can use the headline of the press release or op-ed but be sure to localize your subject line by referencing your community or region's name to entice local journalists.
- You should send personal emails to each journalist, referencing them by name, versus blind copying multiple email accounts.
- If you do not hear back, follow up with media a couple days later via email or phone. For a follow-up email, reply to your original email with a note such as: "I am following up on this to see if you are interested in covering it. I believe it is an important local issue for our community. Please let me know if you have any questions."
- If there is a timely event occurring that you want to highlight for media, send the media outreach out a week or so in advance if possible so journalists have time to prepare. Label this a "media advisory" and include a headline with the date of event and explain the details in a who, what, when, where format to ensure you include all the relevant details. Include your contact information for the media.
- Send a reminder of the event the day before or early on the morning of the event and make sure you're available to respond quickly if the media reaches out to you.