

Tip Sheet: Promoting Your Write-A-Thon through Local Media

Getting coverage in the local press where you live is a powerful way to promote your event – and to draw attention to Amnesty’s work more broadly. Here are some tips on how to pitch local journalists and news outlets on reporting about Write for Rights.

Getting started

Do a little research before approaching members of the media.

- **Decide whom to pitch:** Ask yourself, *Which outlets might be interested in a local W4Rs event? Which local outlets do I consume? Which serves our event’s or campaign’s target audiences?*
- **Compile a list:** Identify outlets and reporting covering your community. These could include local newspapers, local radio and TV stations, popular blogs, community bulletins, and student publications.
- **Gather contact information:** Email addresses and phone numbers are often available on an outlet’s website, and journalists sometimes list their contact information in their social media bios. If you’re stuck, try Googling the reporter’s name and “email.”

Preparing your pitch

- Amnesty International Canada has prepared a sample pitch letter and a sample media advisory. Please customize these templates to suit your event as well as the intended recipients (in this case, members of the media in your community).
- Things to consider when customizing your pitch:
 - **Emphasize the timeliness of the event:** News is about “what’s new” and current. Promoting an event that’s coming up soon is inherently timely. Another timely news hook is International Human Rights Day on December 10.
 - **Stress local connections:** Local news outlets usually have a relentless focus on their home communities. And they *love* it when they can connect a local story to global current events. Highlight your connections (for example, how long you’ve live in the community, what you do for work, what you study at the local college or university, etc.). All of these details could serve as entry points for a reporter looking for “local colour.”
 - **Consider mentioning a case or two:** You may wish to mention a case or two that you find particularly compelling, especially if you or a member of the group have a connection to the case. This year, it helps that Write for Rights features a Canada-focused case. Editors will no doubt find it interesting that people around the world will be mobilizing for Indigenous land defenders who have been criminalized by Canada for protecting their rights and territory.

Making your pitch

- **Send a pitch email or leave a voicemail.** Keep it fairly short. In your pitch email, make sure the 5Ws (who, what, where, when, why) are clearly visible at a glance.
- **Make it personal.** Send your pitch letter to one reporter or news outlet at a time, making sure to address them by name. If you’re contacting lots of outlets, consider sending personalized pitch letter to your top targets and then send the media advisory as part of a

mass email to a broader list.

- **Assign a contact for the day of the event.** Include their email and cell phone number (with their permission, of course). Keep in mind that media may not confirm their attendance at your event until the day of, or they could show up unannounced.
- **Consider offering to supply pictures or a short write-up.** Many local publications have very few – sometimes only one – staff and thus might not have the resources to write about your event. They may relish the opportunity to publish content generated by you. If so, make sure to ask them to provide specifications around their editorial needs, including: a word count; a submission deadline; how many photos they need; what they would like to see in the pictures.
- **Friendliness goes a long way.** Reporters and editors may not cover your 2024 Write-a-thon, but they may think to contact you about future events.

Handing media at the event

- **Assign designated speakers.** Diversity is great (age, ethnic background, gender, etc.). Compelling stories are, too.
- **Understand reporters' needs.** TV journalists will want compelling images for example. Reference materials (ie. A press release or case sheets) are helpful.
- **Consent is key! Ensure that people aren't filmed or quoted on the record without their consent.** (Presenters should be comfortable with being quoted.)
- **Make sure to stick to the approved messaging about the cases.** If you're asked a question that you're not sure the answer to, offer to put the reporter in touch with Cory, AICSES's media officer (media@amnesty.ca) who will put them in touch with a relevant spokesperson and/or other resources.

Other ways to promote your event in the media

- **Submit a Letter to the Editor.** Check the newspaper's submission guidelines for word limits, as they're rarely over 200 words. You can use relevant information, as well, such as current events, anniversaries, etc. as the "hook" for your Letter to the Editor. If possible, include Amnesty International in your letter and notify the regional and/or national office of your submission.
- **Write an op-ed.** You may also want to draft an **op-ed** about a particular case, or about the work Amnesty International does in your community. The latter is especially effective in small media outlets. It's a good idea to have a hook rather than just submitting something out of left field. For example, you can submit something for Human Rights Day on December 10. Check the website of your local news outlets for details on how to submit a letter to the editor or op-ed.
- A good opinion editorial is timely, factual, and contains powerful language to convey a larger point. It should be less than 800 words. When submitting, make sure to include a brief bio, along with your phone number and email address. Pitch one outlet at a time. Remember, most places won't run something that has appeared elsewhere.

Keep us informed

- Did your event get covered, or did your Letter to the Editor or op-ed get published? Let us know by emailing us at media@amnesty.ca. Keeping us

informed means we can share your successes even further. What's more, it helps us track our collective impact!