

WOMEN IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

You Can Make a Difference

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

Effective use of the media can vastly improve your profile as a Local Government candidate and, therefore, your chances of being elected. Editorial coverage is generally the most desirable and valuable resource for building your reputation and can significantly enhance the money you spend on advertising, particularly given spending limits that apply (see Advertising section below). However there are some general 'dos and don'ts' about working with the media that will help you maximise the coverage you get in newspapers and on radio and television.

THE BEST APPROACH

The media's primary interest is topical issues and the stories they generate in order to attract readers, listeners and viewers. The commercial media is also driven by the need to sell advertising and all print and electronic media are seeking to increase their circulation and audiences.

Media organisations do not regard themselves as a community service (though they provide these services) and should not be approached as one. You need to be professional, strategic, approachable and well prepared from your very first contact with the media.

If you have a long lead time before you announce yourself as a candidate, you may wish to begin building your media profile by:

- Taking a public stance on an issue for which you have a particular passion
- Becoming publicly pro-active in a community role or as a representative of an organisation in which you already have some standing.

This may take the form of letters to the editor or talkback radio, taking a vocal role in community meetings, issuing media statements on behalf of your organisation or interest group or creating opportunities for media coverage for which you are the spokesperson.

If your first contact with the media is as a Local Government candidate, you will be one of many hopefuls vying for limited space or air time and therefore, will need to be even more astute about how and when you can attract coverage.

PLAN YOUR STRATEGY

- Start reading, listening and watching news media critically to better understand when and how they cover issues
- Plan your media strategy as part of your campaign strategy. You should be sending clear and consistent messages about yourself and the issues that matter to you, so think carefully about your comments and the way you wish to be perceived. Think about an identifiable election 'platform' rather than dispersing your comments across a whole range of issues that other candidates are covering
- Try to structure your comments in a positive way even if you are being critical; offer alternatives and try and elevate your profile without attacking your opponents

- Pick your issues and try and take the lead rather than 'getting on the band wagon' after the event. If you are approached for comment, take the time to consider your response and call your media contact back. Make a few key points to clarify your views and re-iterate these; only comment when you are confidently informed about an issue and it forms part of your platform
- Be gracious if you do and when you don't get media coverage

USE MEDIA RELEASES

- Keep your media release short and sharp – you may only receive a few paragraphs of coverage if at all.
- Prepare a Media Contacts List. You may wish to approach individual media organisations to determine their preference for faxed or emailed media releases. This can provide the opportunity to introduce yourself to a reporter or Chief of Staff.
- Use the Media Release Template attached and circulate your Media Release to all relevant media at the same time. Mondays are traditionally 'slow news days' so Sunday releases may be effective. Saturday newspapers generally have the widest readership and Sunday newspapers have more of a feature or magazine story focus. Remember weekly newspaper publications, local community inserts in daily newspapers (contact your local editor), community newspapers and FM radio stations.
- Spread your media releases over time in the lead-up to an election and use advertising to keep your profile in the public eye once editorial coverage becomes harder to obtain, closer to the election.
- Make yourself available for further comment and a photograph and provide suggestions, times and contact details for follow-up particularly if you have a significant news story.

USE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR AND TALKBACK RADIO

- Use Letters to the Editor and Talkback Radio to flag issues or respond to issues which may not warrant a media release or for which you have been unable to obtain coverage.
- Ask your campaign supporters to publicly support your stance (rather than your candidacy).
- Keep your letters and comments short and to the point and always identify yourself as a candidate once your candidacy has been announced.

PREPARE A PROFILE

Some media organisations invite candidates to submit a short profile just prior to the election.

- Project yourself into your role as a Councillor or Alderman, and focus on what you will do rather than what you have done
- Focus on the issues on which you have built your profile, reiterate your stance and speak in the context of community benefit
- Put the most important information at the top of the page
- Use an experienced photographer to take a portrait photograph (head and shoulders)
- Try and differentiate yourself from your opponents

ADVERTISING

Most candidates invest in some paid advertising to support their campaign. There is a limit of \$5,000 (for the purchase of advertising time or space) as outlined in the Tasmanian Electoral Commission *Information for Candidates* booklet, downloadable at: <http://www.electoral.tas.gov.au>. Make sure you are aware of and observe all the other requirements, eg all advertisements must be authorised and consent must be obtained before using other candidates' names in advertisements.

- Set an advertising budget and stick to it. Compare costs and community newspapers if appropriate. These have cheaper display advertising rates but longer advertising deadlines.
- Book newspaper space and radio and television advertising spots if you decide to use them, as early as you can. Weigh up the benefits of radio and television against well-placed print advertisements.
- If you can afford to, use a graphic designer to differentiate your print advertisements rather than have the advertising department design your ad.
- Seek deadlines for Display Advertising and submit your print-ready advertisements according to specifications in plenty of time. Ask to see a proof if the newspaper is designing the ad for you.
- Use a good quality head and shoulders image of yourself
- Think about who is most likely to vote for you and where they are most likely to see, hear and read your advertisements and place them accordingly.
- Reinforce the key message(s) of your campaign and use a wordsmith if you can. Try not to be too clever, too general or too wordy.

WEBSITES AND EMAIL

Personal websites can be effective in providing additional information to prospective voters though are less effective in building awareness. If you can develop a quality website at little cost, you may attach the address to your advertisements and promotional flyers.

- Only issue campaign emails from your **personal** computer to recipients in your **personal** address book.
- Use Bcc (blind carbon copy) to email your network and ensure that the addresses of email recipients remain private.

Date

**Opening paragraph
One sentence**

Elaborate on the headline and outline the issue/proposal. Write in the third person. Use simple language.

MEDIA RELEASE

One-line headline should grab attention and articulate the key message

Call for more women councillors

2nd Paragraph
Introduce yourself and state your position and proposition

Tasmanian women are being encouraged to nominate for this year's local government elections to give women a greater say in decision-making.

XX City Council candidate Jill Bloggs, said increasing the number of women councillors was the best way of ensuring that issues affecting women in Tasmania made it to the agendas of their local council.

Justify or qualify your position

She said despite the fact that women made up more than half the population, less than a quarter of local councillors were women.

Provide examples

"The decisions made at local government level have the most immediate impact on communities and women must be part of that process to ensure that their needs and are being met," she said

She said the lack of child care services in rural communities in the XX area was a prime example.

Include call to action

"I hope that more women will put themselves forward as candidates in next month's elections and urge women voters to support them on polling day."

A free information sessions for women interesting standing for local council will be held at the XX centre on Thursday 10th August at 5:30 pm.

Limit to around 200 words unless commenting on significant, complex issues

For further information contact:

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Candidate
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Mobile: 123 456 789 (after hours)
Email: jill.bloggs@email.net.au

Include contact details

Fax, email or hand deliver to news outlet.
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