

Working with the media

The local media can be an effective way for Catalyst groups to get their message across to the public, the government and to companies. There are a number of ways you can achieve this:

Forums for Getting Your Message Across

1. Join an Existing Dialogue

There are a number of public forums in which you can participate

- Letters section of your local newspaper – write a letter
- Talkback radio – become one of the callers!
- Internet based forums – sign up and join in

2. Create a Story

Community newspapers are frequently looking for good stories. Try to think of ways you can put a local spin on your issue. Three effective ways are:

- Rather than focussing your story on the issue, focus your story on your group. This creates a locally based human interest angle. For example, you could report on your visit to your local MP and why group members are interested.
- Find someone in your local community who has been directly affected by the issue – eg if someone in your group has visited a poor country a story could be moulded around the visit – “Digging Ditches in Africa” could tell the story of a local group who help build latrines in Africa.
- Stage an event and report on it. Each year Catalyst groups are encouraged to stage a community advocacy event and could invite media to report on it.

Strategies for Getting Your Message Across

1. Make the Call/Write the Letter

Take the initiative to join in one of the many forums available for ongoing dialogue.

- Listen to talkback radio and phone in when the time is ripe. You will have very limited time, so know what you want to say and think up a catchy 10 second way of saying it. For example, rather than saying “I think Australia should give 0.5% of its gross national income in foreign aid” say “If Australia gave just 50 cents in every \$100 we could provide safe drinking water to 19 million people. I don’t think 50 cents for every \$100 is too much to ask.” If you have a personal

experience that illuminates your point use it, but remember that you will have very limited time.

When using talkback radio (or being interviewed) the key is to know what point you want to make and to make it. Whatever question you're asked make sure you turn it around to the point you want to make. For example, if you want to make a point about the level of Australia's aid program and the interviewer says "But we all know that the problem is corruption" don't get drawn into a debate about corruption. You could say something like "No-one's asking for money to go to corrupt Governments. There are plenty of workable Governments in the developing world, and we're asking for an increase in the aid to those Governments. Did you know that if we gave just 50 cents for every \$100 we earned that each year could see 4500 fewer women dying in childbirth?"

- Write a letter to the letters section of the paper. Each paper will have guidelines about length and the information that needs to be included. Remember that many more letters will be received than published, so you will need to make yours outstanding. A good strategy is to offer a strong and even controversial response to an issue that is currently in the news (but do it respectfully!).
- Online forums allow you to have a regular, ongoing input to public debate. Look for forums that have large numbers of participants, sign up and start making your case!

2. Submit a Story

Find someone in your Catalyst group or church who is good with words. Ask them to write a short news story and submit it, along with some high quality photos, to your local newspaper. When writing the story they need to keep it relatively short – the paper will most likely use it as a filler, not the lead story – and give it a strong human interest angle.

3. Issue a Press Release

A press release alerts local media to an upcoming event and invites them to report on it. It needs to simply and succinctly identify your event as newsworthy. Newsworthy means that you need to show why the general public will be interested in this event/issue. Your press release should be no more than 150-200 words and focus on one key idea. Use active voice sentences – eg "Church initiative changes lives" rather than "Lives have been changed by church initiative".

Your press release should be formatted along the following lines:



For immediate release: date

Timbuctoo Baptist Catalyst Group
48 Timbuctoo Way, Timbuctoo
Phone: 4444 4444
Mobile: 0444 444 444
Email: bob@timbuctoo.com.au
Contact: Bob Mullins

**EVENT TITLE HERE IN UPPERCASE
SATURDAY MARCH 18, 2006**

Details placed here. First paragraph should cover who, what, where, when. second paragraph provide more detail and focus on why it needs to be covered ie, what makes this newsworthy

It can also be helpful to attach a page of background notes, such as the fact sheets that will be provided by Catalyst.

Send your press release to the journalist who covers stories in your focus area (read the papers for a week or two and identify which journalist to target, or ring the newspaper and ask whom the release should be marked to). Send it in two weeks out from your event, then issue another release a few days before your event. In-between see if you can make phone contact with the journalist. Introduce yourself, your organisation, and your event and ask if they have a minute or two for you to tell them about it. ("Hi, I'm Mary Jones from the Timbuktu Catalyst Group. We're linked in with Catalyst Groups all over Australia, and in two weeks time we're holding X event. Do you have a minute for me to tell you about it?") If they say yes make your spin newsworthy. Again, focus on the local human interest.

If the media outlets show up at your event make sure you talk to the journalists and offer them assistance with the story. If they decide to interview you keep returning to the main point/s you want to make.

If no media show up at your event write up a story anyway (see point 2 above) and submit it for consideration.