

# Road Safety Advocacy Toolkit

## MONITORING AND RESPONDING TO THE MEDIA



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# Monitoring and Responding to the Media

## Why is it Important

Monitoring and responding to the media are two important elements of your media advocacy work. While they are separate activities, they are closely related. Monitoring media coverage involves tracking how the media talks about your issue, both in relation to your advocacy activities and the issue in general. Media monitoring should also directly inform and improve the way you respond to coverage of your issue, or to comments made by key stakeholders and opinion leaders, thereby enhancing the visibility and coverage of your issue.

Monitoring and strategically responding to the media are important to incorporate in the planning and execution of your campaign.

## Planning

You'll make the best decisions on how and where to invest your media advocacy resources when you have a clear understanding of the media landscape. This includes knowing how your issue is currently being discussed in the media. This knowledge will allow you to effectively "frame" (or present) your issue so that it is relevant to the current conversation.

Media monitoring is the best way to gain this understanding. It allows you to see what aspects of your issue already get the media's attention and how reporters discuss the issue. For instance, you may find that the media is interested in the "shock value" of large scale statistics that show annual death rates. This demonstrates that having statistics at hand is important to gain media attention. However, you may also notice that the media is focusing blame for road crashes on road users themselves, rather than the lack of strong policies or enforcement. Identifying this can help you to develop messaging that "reframe" the issue for media in the context of your proposed solutions.

As a result, media monitoring allows you to be flexible in your planning and continue to adjust your approach toward the media throughout your campaign.

## Execution

Once your media advocacy activities are underway, media monitoring will allow you to judge the impact and reach of your outputs, as well as track performance so you can adjust your plan as needed. It can help answer the questions that are important to ensure your campaign stays on track, such as:

- Did your press release result in news articles?
- Was there earned media coverage of your press conference?
- Did your digital campaign engage journalists or your target audience?

In the media, stories unfold quickly, and media monitoring can help you to respond in time to either encourage or re-direct a particular type of coverage. For instance, if a major development in your campaign occurs, such as a key Member of Parliament supporting the passage of a road safety Bill in Parliament, you can quickly plan and implement a strategy to leverage this through media advocacy, such as highlighting the comments in a press release that calls on the Government to act on the comments from the MP. Your ongoing media monitoring will help you know which particular response will be most appropriate, or at times it can inform a decision to not proactively respond, if for instance you see that a particular incident that might have appeared important, has stopped gaining public attention.

Identifying how the media are reporting on your issue can also inform your planning on how to engage them in your ongoing campaign. If you know that journalists are more interested in one particular 'angle,' then using this as a 'hook' to pitch your story is a worthwhile approach. This should also inform adjustments in your media action plan and potentially also the strategies you have selected to achieve your objectives.

## What needs to be done?

### Setting up Media Monitoring

How you conduct media monitoring is usually dependent on resources and time available, as well as the level of sophistication and customization you need in your monitoring. There are two basic ways to conduct monitoring: either through a “do it yourself” approach using free online resources or by hiring a communications or public relations firm to provide the service for you using their tools.

#### 1. Conducting online monitoring on your own.

The Google Alerts service is the most comprehensive online resource for free media monitoring. First, you will nominate key words. When these words are found by Google, you will automatically receive an email notification. Go to <https://support.google.com/alerts/answer/4815696?hl=en> for more info.

When choosing keywords, it's important to strike a balance between general and specific. For instance, if you select only 'road safety' you may be overwhelmed by a large number of daily notifications, many of which will not be useful. However, choosing 'road safety legislation' or 'child restraints' may provide a more targeted outcome. You can also restrict to certain languages, regions and sources. Just remember, you also don't want to be so specific that you exclude information that could be vital. Also, remember to revise key words and regions to reflect changes in your campaign.

#### 2. Using professional media monitoring services.

Professional services are not free, but they will customize information and allow for more individualized data, including geographic areas and specific outlets (such as newspapers, digital, radio etc) that you identified in your planning. Professional services often provide accompanying periodic reports with greater detail about the trend of reporting on your issue. You can request that reports be refined to include sub-categories, such as 'road crashes' or 'road safety legislation'. You can also stipulate how often you receive them - for example, a daily digest and a monthly analysis report. When working with a professional firm, it's also relatively easy to revise key words and geographic focus - for example, moving from cities to a regional focus - as the campaign progresses and your needs change.

## Using monitoring to respond to the media

Media monitoring is only worthwhile if you use the results to inform your campaign. Here are two important ways to ensure that monitoring results in better coverage of your issue.

### 1. Refining your strategies and activities

Sometimes the results from media monitoring might signal that you should shift your approach to the media. For example, you might learn that one element of your story is gaining more media traction than you expected, and you want to continue to take advantage of that. Or you may receive negative press, which you want to address, either directly or indirectly (more information on this below).

As mentioned, there are always times during a campaign when you need to refine your strategies and activities, whilst ensuring you keep focused on the policy objective.

There are two main ways to capitalize upon or counter a trend of media reporting:

- Create news: Reports, press conferences, demonstrations, stakeholder meetings, and other creative means can keep the policy issue in the public view and shape the debate
- Play off breaking news: Linking your issue to a 'hot' topic will increase the chances of media attention. If you see that certain aspects of your issue are being reported, you can work to capitalize on that angle. For instance, if there is a public outcry about reckless motorcycle riders, you could plan an event or publish an op-ed that calls for greater enforcement of speed limits and helmet laws. Similarly, if there is a popular topic from another field that relates to traffic issues, such as a major sporting event, you could create a media pitch about the risks of driving to large public venues, like the stadium, and emphasize the importance of traffic law enforcement in public safety

### 2. Dealing with negative press coverage

Most everyone involved with media campaigns will deal with negative press coverage at one time or another. When deciding whether, and how, to respond, it is important to distinguish between media coverage that you disagree with and coverage that portrays your issue inaccurately. It is also critical to determine whether the story is true before you respond.

If you see a negative story about your campaign, first consider whether a response is worthwhile. Will making a comment only give more attention to the negative reaction? If the story is inaccurate or harmful to your issue – for example, it claims child restraints are too expensive and won't work or that drink driving is culturally ingrained – and you feel that you should respond, consider the following:

- Issuing a basic statement presenting your perspective and the facts in a simple manner that reduces the chance of public outcry or the media focusing on the perceived negative aspects
- Ensure that your media response focuses on the issue in a positive way, rather than an argument with the journalist
- Don't make a bad situation worse. Sometimes, it is better to let things 'blow over' than to call more attention to the problem by complaining and possibly attracting more negative coverage

The GRSP guide to Selecting your Media Advocacy Tactics can guide you on what you should consider when deciding how to respond to media reporting of your campaign.



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