

A photograph of two women in a field. One woman in the foreground is wearing a red t-shirt and jeans, and is holding a long wooden pole. The other woman, wearing a dark t-shirt and jeans, is wearing a blue surgical mask and is also holding a long wooden pole. They appear to be working together to clear trash from the ground. The background is a hilly landscape with sparse vegetation and some trash scattered on the ground.

Engaging Media for Clean Air Awareness and Impact

A practical guide for civil society and government campaigners

Why media matters for clean air

- Air pollution is invisible until media makes it visible
- Media influences what government prioritises
- Public understanding drives political will
- Strong coverage builds demand and support for clean air interventions

Newsworthiness is key

- Journalists choose stories based on:
 - Impact: who is affected and how seriously?
 - Prominence: is a big man/woman involved?
 - Proximity: how close is the story to target audience?
 - Timeliness: why now?
 - Conflict: what tension or accountability is involved?
 - Human interest: whose story evokes strong emotions?
 - Solutions: what change is possible?

From science to story

- Campaigners often have great data, but...
 - Data alone doesn't move audiences
 - Translate scientific language into everyday language
 - Connect numbers to daily life (school, work, money, children's futures)

The one clear message

- Every media engagement should answer:
 1. What is the problem?
 2. Why should the public care?
 3. What must happen now?
 4. Who must act?

Language that resonates

Instead of:

- “PM2.5 exceeds ambient thresholds”

Say:

- “The air is unsafe to breathe most days”

Language that resonates

Instead of:

- “Anthropogenic emissions”

Say:

- “Pollution from our vehicles and factories”

Human stories drive policy change

- To amplify impact:
 - Identify real people as the face of the issue
 - Tie their struggles to systemic failures
 - Show the urgency and the stakes

Visuals increase reach and retention

- Examples for clean air advocacy:
 - Photos of hotspots near schools, markets, hospitals
 - Short videos from communities
 - Data visualisations that simplify risk
 - Maps of pollution concentration

Strong media relationships deliver impact

- Journalists are gatekeepers between your evidence and the public
- Trust and familiarity ensure your issue gets attention quickly
- You become a go-to source when pollution news breaks
- Relationships protect/ensure story accuracy and context

How to build and sustain trust with journalists

- Share credible data even when it doesn't benefit your campaign directly
- Offer expert quotes or community voices on short notice
- Give context and help them avoid technical mistakes
- Be honest: if you don't know, say so and follow up
- Don't lie!

Build strategic media relationships

- How to engage reporters constructively:
 - Keep a list of health, environment and transport journalists
 - Keep in touch, check on and show interest in them
 - Don't only show up when you need them
 - Appreciate their deadlines and constraints

Show them what you've got

- Share concise background notes
- Offer expert sources and credible data
- Respond quickly to requests

Smart pitching and timing

- Tie your message to news cycles and events
- Provide a hook: new report, new data, viral incident
- Offer exclusives occasionally
- Plan proactive media engagements instead of reactive responses

Interview confidence

- Three key principles:
 1. Be personable: show empathy and conviction
 2. Be precise: support claims with verified facts
 3. Be focused: stay on message through tough questions

Track and convert impact

- Media visibility must lead to change:
 - Link stories to specific calls to action
 - Monitor reactions from officials
 - Follow up with journalists and policymakers
 - Share success and progress updates with the media
 - Keep the issue alive beyond one headline

Quick checklist for campaigns

- Before you engage the media, confirm:
 - Your message is clear and compelling
 - You have a strong human story
 - You have visuals and data ready
 - You know the policy change you want
 - You know the journalists to contact

Final takeaway

- Continually and **persistently** work with the media to
 - Make the invisible visible.
 - Make the silent heard.
 - Make the harmful urgent.
 - Show the path to change.

THANK YOU!

- Questions?
- Comments?
- Email: ato@newnarratives.org