



Media Guide for AFSA Local Presidents

Contacting the media is a valuable way to get messages about your local members' issues out to the public. This guide is a resource on how to establish media contacts.

Importance of the AFSA connection

AFSA locals have a direct and important relationship with AFSA, the national union that provides its members with access to other organizations and a national voice. AFSA's affiliation with the AFL-CIO is very powerful, and its President, Diann Woodard, sits on its General Executive Board.

It is very important for locals to identify themselves as being part of AFSA when they talk to the media – referring to the national union as part of your identity immediately communicates all of your affiliations. It informs people that your local is connected to national organizations and that you are not alone when fighting for or exercising collective bargaining rights, legislation, and professional issues. Communicating that you are part of AFSA gives you more credibility when talking to the media. They will take you more seriously when they know you are part of a large, national union.

Similarly, it is also advantageous to use the AFSA logo in conjunction with your logo in your print and online materials relating to the local union and union business. Please see the Style Guide for Use of the Official AFSA Logo for guidance about how to incorporate the logo in your materials.

Position yourself as a media source

One of the best ways to increase your visibility in the public sphere is to get your name in the media, whether that be in print, online, on tv or on the radio. As the local president, you are an expert in education and union policy, and your members and the media will look to you to provide reliable information and judgment when speaking on these issues.

One challenge in media relations is actually getting quoted in the press. Remember, you are not only speaking for your local and its members, but are speaking on behalf of your AFSA colleagues across the nation. Never offer faulty information or information

you are unsure of. Use facts and statistics to reinforce your statements. If you are unsure of anything, always tell the journalist that you will get back to them later with your quote. It is always better to keep mum and double-check your facts before talking to the media.

When a reporter contacts you, ask what the story will focus on – the key is to determine precisely what the reporter wants to know and to provide clear insight and information. The reporter will always have an angle in the story. Figure out what that angle is when giving your answer. Reporters do not have a lot of time to chat, so be prepared to give a concise, unambiguous response. Education reporters often change assignments and are not necessarily informed about the complexities in education. You can certainly provide background information, and it is important to become a valuable “source” for the media. Remember: when speaking to reporters, you are never “off the record.”

Researching the reporter and the media outlet is essential before being interviewed. Understand what stories the reporter has written before, or what type of stories the media outlet tends to run. This will make the relationship between you and the reporter stronger. A good tip is to read the local dailies and get a sense of what the news stories are in your area. Finally, never alienate a reporter – that will quickly eliminate you as a media source and also reflect badly upon your local and colleagues in AFSA.

Getting your message out

Be proactive! The television, radio and newspapers in your city are good outlets for you to consider reaching out to. AFSA has compiled a Local Media Profile for each AFSA local with key reporters/writers/editors that cover education/labor issues.

You can use the profile as a starting point for gathering media contacts and you can pitch a story or send a media release directly to that person who covers the beat AFSA falls into. Or, you can respond to an existing story in a publication – keep an eye out for articles on topics relevant to you and your local’s issues in your area newspapers. A response can be as simple as stating whether you agree or disagree with a particular story, and a clear explanation as to why you feel that way.

Television can be a bit trickier to pitch a story to – keep in mind that the best way to get TV coverage is to have an extremely compelling and visually appealing topic. One suggestion on increasing the chance of getting coverage is inviting a member of Congress to tour your school and letting the press know about it. Another way to engage local tv stations is to share a personal story. Media outlets love the human interest stories. An example of a good story would be one about a local AFSA principal staying after school hours to help clean the school since it can’t afford janitors due to budget cuts. Just remember, human interest stories are high selling points when trying to get tv coverage.

Once you are recognized as a trusted media source, it's likely that you will be contacted by the media again – so build up relationships with journalists that you like! Building relationships allows for a better chance of being treated fairly in the media and getting your ideas accurately out to the public.

With the rapid age of new technology upon us, it is vital to understand social media and the Internet and how they can play a role in contacting the media to get your message out for AFSA.

The Internet is a valuable tool. One thing you should pay attention to is blogs. Find blogs on the Internet that relate to education policy or union policy. There may even be blogs about education policy in your area. Understand that blogs are opinion. It is someone's views. Use blogs to see what people are saying about your local.

One of the more interesting ways to contact the media to get your message across is through social media. For example, use your own Twitter account or your local AFSA Twitter account (if you have one) to follow the media outlets and reporters in your area. Most of them will have Twitter accounts. Following them on Twitter gives you an idea of what they are interested in and gives you another way of researching the outlets.

You can also mention an article, blog, or video that is about your local or issue in your area on Twitter. By using the @ symbol, mention the outlet or reporter, and the story you want out there. Sometimes, the outlets or reporters will re-tweet (RT) your story to their followers or ask you for more information. Always be careful what you tweet about; remember that you are always representing AFSA, locally and nationally.

Quick tips

- Reach out to the media outlets in your area: newspapers, radio, or television.
- Personally introduce yourself to local reporters that cover education and labor.
- Establish credibility – after all, you are the expert in school leadership – explain how a specific issue affects you, your school, and your members.
- Meet with editorial boards of local newspapers.
- Submit letters to the editor in your local and state newspapers in response to articles that are important to your members.
- Invite your representatives to tour your school and invite the media to cover it.
- Whenever you have photo opportunities with lawmakers be sure to send them to your local media.
- When AFSA sends you a sample letter to the editor, personalize it to fit your local and have you and your members submit it.