



Media & communications

When considering effective communications with partners, councillors and stakeholders, you must also consider the outside media. Don't fall into the trap of failing to be pro-active and wait for the media to come to you. This is more likely to invite stories that reflect the journalist's agenda and not the positive reasons why your council is engaging in international activity.

Instead, councils should seek to have a robust and positive news and features flow that makes it difficult for journalists to ignore the wider context of the benefits to the council and the local area.

Things to think about:

- 1. Involve your council's press office from the start.** *Make sure your press office is aware of your plans right from the start and let them advise you rather than the other way round. Don't just tell them when you think the time is right.*
- 2. Be positive and confident.** *Always seek to focus on the positive benefits of your activity in a way that puts any cynical or negative criticism in the shade. What do you want to be **recognised for**?*
- 3. Be aware and prepare.** *Anticipate that there will be some journalists searching for negative angles – seeking, for example, to portray an international visit as a junket – and make sure you have concise and convincing rebuttals. Prepare a Q&A – what would your **harshes critic think/ask**?*
- 4. Look out for 'heroes'.** *The media want a human interest angle and there may be some real 'heroes' in your international development activity, either among overseas partners, local community partners or your own staff.*
- 5. Make sure people are well prepared.** *Ask your press office to help ensure anyone who is giving interviews or dealing with the media has some training and advice. Think about the support you need to give to any overseas partners who may not be used the UK media*
- 6. Get local journalists involved early.** *Local journalists are often keen to fill paper space and a **positive relationship can encourage positive coverage.***



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Checklist

- **Are you making the most of your own media** – the council's website, newsletters etc. – to tell the story about your international development activity that you want to tell?
- Have you identified **someone who is a good communicator to be the spokesperson** and lead communications about international links?
- **Are you joining up with partners in the community**, e.g.local schools, so that the media get a clear understanding of benefits to them? Could press contact be made through partners to avoid negative coverage of the council?
- Have you taken the wind out of the sails of any negative media, by **disclosing tangible facts and figures and setting out the real gains** to balance against the costs?
- Have you ensured that **internal awareness of your work** is high and that colleagues within your authority are advocating on your behalf?
- Have you taken time to think through and have **clear policies on things that are normal practice in some developing world contexts but could be misinterpreted or twisted by the media**, such as exchange of gifts?

Case-studies

The **City of York and North Yorkshire County Council** on the back of links with the Gambia have confirmed York as a pre-games training camp venue for two West African teams. The announcement received good local press and after simply asking local businesses to get in touch if they wanted to be involved, the link has since received support from several local businesses, highlighting the value of the link to both the council and the local economy.

In order to ensure that the right messages are getting out, **Rotherham Council** have worked with the media every step of the way throughout their Fairtrade campaign. They have worked both internally through their communications team and the Rotherham Partnership newspaper (which goes to all households in the Borough) and externally with local radio stations and newspapers.