

# Shift the Bay Media Relations Best Practices Training

## August 2021

This document contains our talking points for each topic area of the training. At the end of the document, you'll find a list of questions asked at the training and the responses provided.

<b>Topic and relevant slides</b>	<b>Talking Points</b>
<b>Slack (Slides 4-5)</b>	<p><b>About Slack</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Used to instant message people across different organizations.</li> <li>● We'll communicate time-sensitive media requests to the Shift The Bay slack channel.</li> <li>● For help setting up Slack, email Rosa Colman at <a href="mailto:rcolman@mrss.com">rcolman@mrss.com</a> or Rebecca Steadly at <a href="mailto:rsteadly@mrss.com">rsteadly@mrss.com</a>.</li> </ul>
<b>Bay Area reporters (Slides 7-9)</b>	<p><b>Building reporter relationships during COVID</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Show that you regularly follow their content by sending short emails referencing their recent articles and retweeting their tweets. Make sure you're using twitter as an individual, not your organization, so that reporters can associate your emails/communications with your online twitter presence.</li> <li>● Create Twitter Lists (i.e. "Bay Area housing reporters" and use Tweetdeck to track them.</li> <li>● Be responsive -- if a reporter reaches out, make sure you're getting back to them in a timely manner. If you don't have the info they need right away, at least let them know when they can expect to hear from you. Being totally unresponsive or "ghosting" reporters will only sour your relationship.</li> <li>● Be a resource. We often think of reporters as "targets" that we want to win over, but when you become a really trusted resource to a reporter you'll find that they'll start coming to you with questions/ideas.</li> <li>● Connect reporters to other information or orgs. Think about how you can be helpful to their reporting. Maybe you know of a data report, organization, or individual that they should connect with -- suggest that! What may seem obvious to you about this field may not be obvious to them, especially if they're newer to the Bay Area and/or the housing beat.</li> <li>● Meet them if you can -- even for a phone "coffee." In non-COVID times, meeting reporters in person is the best way to build a strong working relationship. Since that's not as much of an option now, don't shy away from setting up time to virtually chat.</li> <li>● Talk to reporters like a normal person! Reporters are people too. It's okay to show a little personality</li> </ul>

	<p>and speak more casually with reporters. If your pitch or conversations feel like transactions rather than conversations, you're less likely to build a strong relationship.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● If an issue you're working on has personally impacted your life, it's okay to talk about that from your own personal perspective. One way to do this is in thank you notes to reporters complimenting their stories.</li> </ul> <p><b>The art of reporter follow-up</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Pitching doesn't end at "send." It's not about just one story -- the goal here is to build a strong working relationship so that you can be a resource going forward.</li> <li>● Phone calls still work! Sometimes the best way to get a hold of reporters is via phone call or even text - don't be afraid to use those methods to follow up.</li> <li>● Short &amp; sweet emails tend to work best. Subject lines are everything! Make yours snappy and stand out in their crowded inbox. What's going to grab the reporter's eye? Names of electeds/activists they already know, interesting/timely new facts, unique assertions, and when relevant, using the word "NEW" before the rest of the subject line.</li> <li>● Space out your reporter communications. Make sure when you're reaching out, there's a purpose -- i.e. thanking them for a story they did, following up with new data or relevant information, or connecting the dots for them about how something is related to a current event or a recent policy change.</li> <li>● Remember that reporters are busy and stressed! Even if they don't reply to your email or use your source for one story they're working on, don't assume this means that your outreach isn't relevant or helpful. Keep reaching out with helpful information.</li> </ul> <p><b>Community voices</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Voices of local, impacted community members are really important to Bay Area reporters.</li> <li>● They want to tell the stories of community members impacted by the bigger decisions they're reporting on -- whether it's the housing crisis, climate change, COVID, etc.</li> <li>● Journalism that respectfully includes impacted voices is journalism that engages people. That's why, whenever possible, we want to connect journalists with folks on the ground who are willing to speak with them.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Bay Area media outlets (Slides 10-15)</b></p>	<p><b>Solar system of Bay Area media outlets</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● There is a lot of crossover and cross-publishing of stories written by reporters at the Bay Area News Group and the papers owned by this company: San Jose Mercury News, East Bay Times, and Marin Independent Journal. You can also expect or request for an op-ed submission at one outlet to be cross-published at the other sister publications.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● SF Chronicle and SFGATE have a bit less crossover but they are owned by the same publisher (Hearst). It can be tough to tell the difference or know what to expect with these outlets. The history is that SFGATE was started by the publishers of SF Chronicle as one of the nation’s first online newspapers. The two papers have a different business model -- SF Chronicle relies on subscribers and a paywall and SFGATE relies more on advertising and does not have the paywall.</li> </ul> <p><b>Smaller outlets matter</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The Bay Area press corps is small and collaborative. So reporters at larger outlets are friendly with and reading pieces by smaller outlets like El Tecolote and the San Jose Spotlight. Elected officials and community members pay attention to these outlets too. These smaller outlets are influential and just as deserving of your press outreach as the larger outlets.</li> </ul> <p><b>Reporters care about this issue first-hand</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Bay Area reporters know what it’s like to find an affordable place to live in the Bay Area. They empathize with advocates on this issue and understand how important housing justice is for the community they live in too.</li> </ul> <p><b>Reaching out to reporters</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● It’s okay to reach out to more than 1 reporter at an outlet. Many are covering housing justice, and sometimes you’ll have to send a pitch to multiple reporters at an outlet in order to get it in front of the right person.</li> <li>● Local radio, papers, and online outlets are your best bet; Bay Area TV news doesn’t go deep on many issues.</li> </ul> <p><b>Bay Area newspapers, online and radio are better bets than TV for deep coverage</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Local TV coverage of housing issues tends to be limited to visibility stunts. TV segments rarely go deep on personal stories or deeper examinations of the systems.</li> <li>● Meanwhile, there are a lot of reporters at newspaper, online and radio outlets in the Bay Area that do an excellent job with deeper reporting and are more likely to create the kinds of impactful media stories that advocates are seeking.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Reporter briefings (Slides 18-19)</b></p>	<p><b>Reporter briefings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Great tactic for introducing your issue/client/POV to reporters.</li> <li>● Reporter briefings are effective in advance of reports, major announcements and when individuals -- experts, storytellers, advocates -- are traveling to reporter hubs.</li> <li>● Briefings can happen in-person or via phone.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Briefings are especially helpful at the start of a new campaign or initiative.</li> <li>● A reporter won't necessarily write a story off of a briefing, but it provides them helpful background info to have going forward.</li> <li>● Reporter briefings are typically used on background, but you should expect anything shared to be on the record.</li> </ul> <p><b>Speaking on background vs. on/off the record</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● On background = the reporter can publish the information given but won't use your name. You'll see examples in the news like, "A senior official with the Biden administration" or "A source close to the matter says."</li> <li>● On the record = expect your name and title to be printed! Think of it as a public conversation. Rule of thumb: Don't say anything you wouldn't want to see on the front page of the New York Times.</li> <li>● Off the record = the information cannot be used for publication</li> <li>● CRITICAL: The terms of the conversation should be negotiated up front. i.e. "I'd like to speak on background about the impact that Governor Newsom's latest policy proposal will have on Bay Area residents who are currently unhoused." <i>You need to make sure you get agreement from the reporter on these terms before you delve into the conversation.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Op-Eds &amp; LTEs (Slides 20-23)</b></p>	<p><b>Opinion pieces and letters to the editor (LTEs)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Different strategies and media moments call for different tactics to reach out to press.</li> </ul> <p><b>LTEs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Usually 150-200 words.</li> <li>● Typically in response to recent coverage of a topic.</li> <li>● LTEs are a great way to shape an opinion and stake your expertise in an issue for reporters to find you in the future.</li> <li>● They're much easier to write and place because they are super short and there are more LTE slots than op-ed slots on the page -- this is true for digital and print media.</li> </ul> <p><b>Op-eds</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Usually at least 600 words.</li> <li>● Used to express an opinion on the commentary page.</li> <li>● Some publications -- especially with online readers -- will have authors write up to 2,000 words to go deeper into an issue. But 600-800 words is normally the space you have to make your case.</li> </ul> <p><b>Steps to submitting an op-ed</b></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● First step (often depends on the outlet and how they prefer to accept opinion pieces): Before putting in the time to write an op-ed, you can test-run the idea by the editors at the outlet you most want to publish it. They'll let you know whether or not they're interested in seeing the piece. <i>Note: they're agreeing to review it, not to necessarily print it.</i></li> <li>● Second step: Draft the op-ed, make sure it includes the strong elements of an op-ed: the right length, new perspective, focused, strong writing, personality, highlighting personal stories. Not self promotional!</li> <li>● Third step: Submit the op-ed to 1 outlet at a time. This is really important!! Before you even submit it, rank your top 3-4 choices of which outlet you want it to run in. Start with your first choice and wait until you have a response (or it's been the appropriate amount of time) to pitch to another outlet.</li> <li>● Fourth step: 48 hours after you've pitched it to the op-ed editor, follow up with them. If they pass, pitch to your next top choice and so on.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Editorial outreach (Slides 24-25)</b></p>	<p><b>Editorial outreach:</b> reaching out to editorial board writers with the goal of getting them to write an editorial on your issue that supports your position</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Outreach can take the form of editorial board meeting or a memo to the editorial board.</li> <li>● Tailor your outreach to the outlet: use local data, reference recent stories they've written about the topic. Show that you've done your homework and are reaching out to them for a reason.</li> <li>● Find the right contacts -- sometimes this can be tricky. At a big outlet, this is probably a beat editorial writer. At a smaller outlet, it's probably the executive or deputy editorial board contact.</li> <li>● Note: editorial board contacts are usually not the same people as the op-ed contacts, unless it's a smaller paper.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Broadcast (Slides 26-27)</b></p>	<p><b>Broadcast media = TV, radio, or podcasts.</b> This usually takes 1 of 2 forms: An in-studio interview (less common in COVID) or getting cameras &amp; reporters to come to your event</p> <p>Broadcast is great for strong visuals, experts, first-person accounts and/or in-depth interviews.</p> <p>Pitching an in-studio interview:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Research the show format ahead of time; make sure what you're pitching makes sense for the show</li> <li>● Keep the pitch short &amp; sweet</li> <li>● In the pitch: include spokesperson bio &amp; photos, note their availability and areas of expertise, link to any past broadcast interviews they've done</li> </ul> <p>For events:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Be intentional about choosing a location -- think about how the location connects to your story and could provide an appealing visual for TV cameras.</li> <li>● Make sure the event is on the TV news desk's calendar. This involves calling and sending emails a few days before then following up on the day of.</li> </ul>
<b>Telebriefings (Slides 28-29)</b>	<p><b>Telebriefings = essentially press conferences held over the phone.</b> Usually used for: breaking news, big announcements, news reports, though tele briefings for non-breaking news have become much more common in COVID.</p> <p>Telebriefings are good for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Getting reporters on the line quickly</li> <li>● Convening experts/reporters who are spread out geographically</li> <li>● When you don't have time, capacity or money for a full press event or multiple interviews - or when you can't gather a group of people together</li> </ul>
<b>Photo Desks (Slides 30-31)</b>	<p><b>Asking photographers to attend and cover an event.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Great tool for on the ground events with compelling visuals.</li> <li>● Ahead of time -- make sure you're on the AP daybook (event planning calendar).</li> <li>● Note: photographers aren't always accompanied by reporters - they can go to events on their own.</li> </ul>
<b>Pitching Press (Slides 33-39)</b>	<p><b>Press outreach timing: when to send your pitch email or submit your op-ed.</b></p> <p><b>When to send press materials</b> (this is a general rule of thumb; these timelines aren't always possible):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Pre-pitch: Try to give yourself at least one week before your event/report release/request.</li> <li>● Media Advisory: Sending the initial media advisory one week ahead of time is a good tactic, though keep in mind you likely won't get RSVPs from key reporters until the last 24-48 hrs when they have a better sense of their day.</li> <li>● Press Release: Sending a press release day of is fine, but if you've got a lot of information that you want reporters to dig into, try to offer it under embargo in advance. <i>Note: make sure they agree to the embargo date &amp; time before you send them the information!</i></li> <li>● Op-Eds and editorial board memos: If you're pitching a significant anniversary or activity that is likely to attract a lot of attention, start reaching out 1 month in advance. Otherwise, try to give yourself 1 week to allow for review and feedback from editors. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Sometimes editorial board outreach is part of a rapid response strategy, but generally this is something you'd pitch a few weeks out.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● LTEs: Generally, you should submit an LTE about a newsy topic within 24-48 hours of the original</li> </ul>

	<p>article/event that you're writing about.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Long lead features: Pitching should begin 3-6 months out, depending on the target outlet and their requirements.</li> </ul> <p><b>Email pitches</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Short, clear + timely subject line (use 'NEW' when accurate).</li> <li>● Announce what's newsworthy at the top of the email.</li> <li>● Make it clear what you can offer the reporter (data, relevant anecdotes, expert voices etc).</li> <li>● Avoid attachments &amp; images -- this could trap your email in a spam filter.</li> <li>● Use hyperlinks to relevant info when you can.</li> <li>● <b>Bold the most relevant info</b> (i.e. event date &amp; time, guest speaker etc).</li> <li>● Always triple check your pitch for typos before sending</li> </ul> <p><u><a href="#">Fast pitch tool from M&amp;R:</a></u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Using complete sentences, answer the 6 questions in the form to make your perfect pitch. The M+R Fast Pitch tool will then put it all together so you can copy, paste and email the reporters on your media list.</li> </ul> <p><b>Tracking press responses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Use a spreadsheet to track ALL responses from reporters (negative, positive, bounced email, might be interested in the future, etc) -- this makes follow-up way easier.</li> <li>● If you're pitching lots of reporters all the time, consider grouping reporter responses in one email folder so that they're easy to find when you need them..</li> </ul>
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## Questions and Answers

**Q:** How much time should we put into nurturing reporter & media relationships when we don't often have a lot of newsworthy items?

**A:** It's always worth it to take the time to introduce yourself to reporters. You should definitely keep in touch with reporters regularly via email & Twitter so that when you do have something newsworthy, you have a relationship to go off of. Keeping in touch with reporters should not require a huge time commitment on your part.

**Q:** Is reaching out to editors at the corporate owned outlets about housing justice a fruitful endeavor, or should we just stick with reaching out to reporters?

**A:** With all the reporters working on housing and racial justice at the big regional papers, the best time spent should be with the reporters instead of the editors.

**Q:** What's a good way to convince folks to share their stories with reporters?

**A:** Explain how sharing personal stories influences journalists, local advocates, politicians, etc. Explain what the reporter is working on, why this person's story is important, and what specifically the reporter is interested in speaking with them about. Offer to do an introductory pre-interview phone meeting with the reporter to soothe any nerves. If necessary, you can ask the reporter to send questions ahead of time so that the people sharing can know what to expect in the interview.

**Q:** How worthwhile do you find press events to be these days? (especially in person during COVID). Even in normal times it seems like an awful lot of effort for often minimal returns.

**A:** In-person press events are helpful for topics that benefit from a specific visual or a powerful & impressive group of stakeholders (i.e. high schoolers standing up against gun violence, striking union workers, nurses/doctors on the front lines of COVID etc). If doing the press event over Zoom won't change the content, keep it that way -- people will be glad you saved them a trip. Additionally, holding press events online can sometimes mean a higher reporter turnout, since it's easier to fit into their busy schedules. Note: During COVID, the threshold for doing an in-person event should be extremely high. Whenever possible, the in-person event should be held outdoors.

**Q:** Op-eds in our organization are collaborative efforts which means at times they take a long time to finalize. What criteria do you use to gauge how long the window of interest from reporters will last?

**A:** Assume a fairly short window of interest from reporters and consider having evergreen content in the op-ed pre-approved by the organization so that there is less to weigh in on during a quick editing turnaround.

**Q:** How valuable are formal press releases when emailing reporters vs. just sending a well-written but less formally formatted email. Is it an issue to send attachments with a press release?

**A:** We've found it's helpful to send a short up-top pitch and then paste the standard press release format below. *Do not send the press release as an attachment*; it can cause your email to hit spam filters at a number of outlets. If you're not able to copy/paste the press release into the body of the email, hyperlink to the external source instead..

**Q:** For broadcast media, any tips for radio vs TV?

**A:** Save TV pitches for your most newsworthy stories. For everything else, pitch to radio -- there's more avenues (different show formats and topics) and the threshold for inclusion is significantly lower than TV. If you pitch a story to several radio stations and no one is interested, it's unlikely that a TV station will pick it up.

**Q:** What's the AP daybook?

**A:** AP Daybook = a list of events that the AP keeps track of and reporters look to to see what events are on the schedule in a place/region on a given day. Contact info for the AP Daybook: Send your event details and event contact info to [news@applanner.com](mailto:news@applanner.com)

**Q:** Any tips on how to pitch to ethnic media, such as Vietnamese American Media, Spanish Media, Chinese American Media, Filipino American Media, African American Media?

**A:** Most of the tips are the same as pitching traditional papers like SF Chronicle. It can be even more important than usual to have impacted community voices that align with the audiences of community and ethnic media outlets. We also find that it's ok to communicate with reporters at non-English language media outlets in English over email and phone. Many are bilingual and will translate what is said in interviews.