

Knowing how to establish a good relationship with the media in your area may be one of the most important things you can do to promote program success.

The media can share the story of what you are doing with your tree-planting program. It can get the word out that you are inviting everyone in the community to lend a hand, and this reinforces the feeling that it is a community-wide project. Publicity encourages volunteer participation, stimulates voluntary donor support, and can make face-to-face fundraising easier. It can also lead to donations of gifts-in-kind, such as equipment, tree stakes, or food and drink for volunteers.

It doesn't matter whether you are in a small town with a regional weekly newspaper or in a city with a daily paper, radio, and TV. What you are doing is of interest to others in the community; in other words, it's news.

If you are fortunate enough to have a media representative on your steering committee, that will simplify the process of getting the word out. If not, this guide provides examples of the tools you can use to disseminate information about your program.

Getting Your Message Out

You can help the media do a good job for you by providing the information they need to know in a clear and concise manner.

In all news stories and media releases, give vital information by answering the traditional journalistic questions: **who, what, where, when, why** and **how**. This information should be included in the first few paragraphs of a media release. Regularly review these questions when you are preparing your media releases.

What is the project?

Who is doing (and sponsoring) the project?

When will it take place?



Where is it going to take place?

Why is it significant or newsworthy?

How will it (the event or project) be done?

Whom do you contact for more information?

Additional Information to Include in Media Releases

- A description of your tree-planting plans and how they will benefit the community.
- A listing of the various roles volunteers can play (invite other citizens to join your effort) and any special equipment they could bring or clothing to wear.
- The size of your grant, if applicable. Be sure to give credit to your funding sponsors. Recognizing their support is not only the right thing to do, but it can help secure future and/or additional support.
- Your plans for raising matching funds (invite businesses and individuals to help).
- A request to individuals and businesses to become partners with your program.
- Mention that this is a long-term, community-wide program.

Timely Notification

Know the media's deadlines for receiving information. Get your information to the media at least a week before you would like to see the story run. If information is to go to a weekly newspaper, send it two weeks in advance. Often newspapers plan stories in advance and they may want to do interviews before writing and publishing a story. Television stations also often schedule their video crews far in advance.

Follow up your news release with a phone call to make sure they received your information and to answer any questions they may have.

Develop Personal Relationships with Members of the Media

Building a personal relationship and developing a level of trust with an editor or reporter will go a long way to help your committee's efforts. It also helps establish you as a reliable source of information. If you are presenting data and facts, provide sources or direct quotes.

Be sure to regularly inform the media of any significant developments in your efforts. Don't be shy about keeping them informed, but also don't send press releases with trivial information or too often.

Working with Newspapers on Special Stories

Special Newspaper Inserts

Several Trees Forever communities have had success working with their local newspapers to develop a timely tree-planting and care special section or insert. This helps your committee spread the word about plans and activities and helps educate the public about proper care and maintenance issues.

Stimulating Feature Stories

Press releases and Public Service Announcements (PSAs) give the media an opportunity to follow up and do more in-depth stories on your program or event. But in many cases they may not pick up on a story idea unless you demonstrate the potential for it first. One way to do this is to submit a letter to the editor or an editorial that you request the paper to publish. This may lead to the paper pursuing the story as a feature article or, in some cases, running the story as you wrote it.



Here are some potential story angles that may stimulate article ideas about your community program:

- **Sponsors:** Significant funding supporters of your program may be highlighted. You could take this opportunity to explain how your local committee partners with Trees Forever, your utility sponsors, and other agencies and organizations, whether local, regional, or statewide. During "press day" interviews, remember to post a banner or other sign to recognize your major sponsors. Check with Trees Forever for available banners or signs.
- **Trees:** Are you planting an unusual or noteworthy species? Has your community completed a tree inventory? What were the results?
- **Long-term goals:** Is your town pursuing Tree City USA status? If so, outline the requirements and how your committee is fulfilling them. What are your committee's overall long-term plans and how will you need help implementing them?
- **Site:** Is a planting site significant, historical, or unusual? For example, Eldon, Iowa, residents and students planted trees at the American Gothic Visitor Center and received good media coverage because they highlighted the historic angle.



TREE CITY USA



- **Tree Care:** Who is providing tree care and maintenance (senior citizens or maybe a youth group)? Has your committee organized any training sessions, either by a local expert, a Trees Forever field coordinator, or Cooperative Extension? Will you hold a pruning demonstration? Include pictures whenever possible.
- **Energy Conservation:** Do any of your sites serve as an energy efficiency demonstration planting? If so, explain how it works and the energy efficiency benefits to be realized by participants.
- **Education:** How are youth involved in your efforts? Is there an outdoor classroom in your community? Are members involved with Master Gardeners, Master Woodland Managers, Master Naturalists, etc.?
- **Volunteers:** Who is involved with your efforts, how are they involved, and have you hosted any recognition events?
- **History:** Research the formation of your town and its early or subsequent citizen tree-planting efforts. Is there a historic tree or grove of trees with an associated story? Interview older citizens about their memories of elm-lined streets.
- **Personalities:** Is there a “noteworthy” citizen involved in your program: special senior citizen, legislator, business leader, or group?

TV Coverage

Television stations look for stories with local interest that offer easy-to-capture visual images. Keep these points in mind when you invite their coverage:

- Are there attractive backdrops or vistas to your project? Are there signs or banners you could use?
- Are there nearby mature trees to provide contrast to the young trees you are planting?
- Can you involve youth, senior citizens, or service clubs?
- Always have a spokesperson selected ahead of time so that he or she will be prepared to present brief and accurate remarks explaining what you are doing.
- Let the public know your need for more volunteer help or donations of money or other resources.

Radio Interviews

Radio stations may interview you live or on tape for broadcast later. A phone call might be all it takes to line up an interview for your group’s spokesperson, and the resulting publicity may do wonders for your program.

Prepare very brief notes for yourself on the key points you want to discuss so that you don’t forget something critical.

It’s a good practice to prepare a sheet with a few talking points or facts that you can give to the interviewer. This will make his or her job easier and will keep the content of the interview on the topics you wish to discuss.

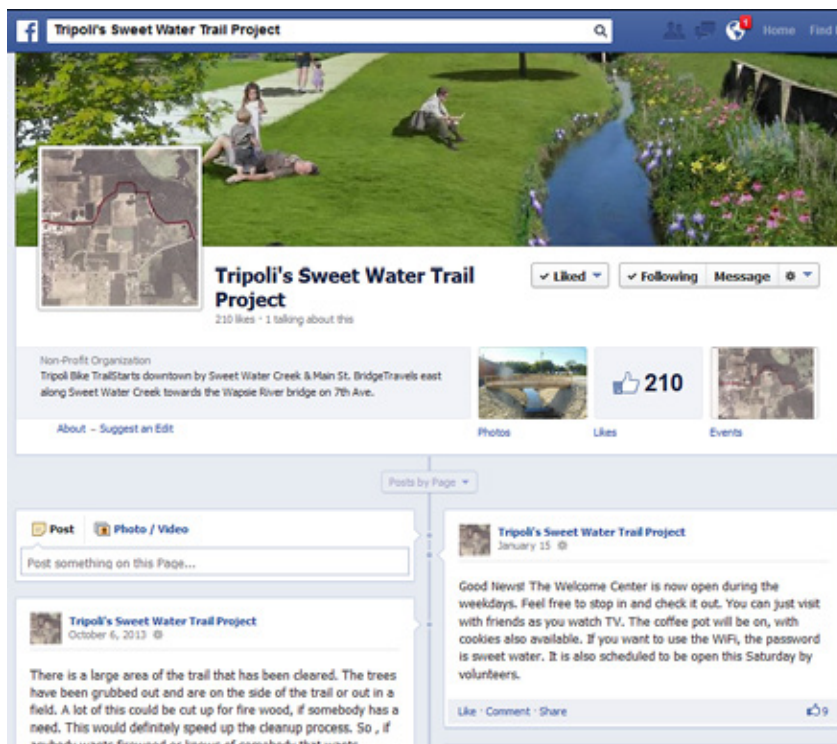
Other Media and Social Media

In getting the word out about your plantings or information about trees and your committee in general, don't forget about other news outlets. Civic organizations, churches, conservation groups, and other organizations may have newsletters that would run your stories. Some of these groups may also be good sources of volunteers. Contact your Chamber of Commerce to see if they have a list of community organizations. They may also help publicize your projects.

If your community has a local cable TV channel, check to see if they have local news shows or if they run public service announcements.

Social media can also help you get the word out. If your tree committee doesn't have a Facebook page, consider creating one. This may be a good volunteer project for youth. Also utilize your city's website and any organization that has a website.

You Tube videos are another way to share information on your website or Facebook page. It is easy to create a short video using your smart phone. You can show a recent planting, highlight citizen involvement, and help build support for your tree program. You can also use it as an education tool – for example, a video showing how to plant a tree, proper pruning techniques, or featuring unfamiliar tree species. This is another good volunteer opportunity for youth.



Join Trees Forever on its mission to plant and care for trees and the environment by empowering people, building community and promoting stewardship.

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