



6 Steps to Spread Head Start Awareness through the Media

Getting airtime on local media is one of the most effective ways to communicate Head Start's value to new audiences. This toolkit guides programs through the process of connecting with local media.

1. Gather your Resources

The most important thing to do before reaching out to any media outlets is gathering all the resources and information that will help you convey your message. These resources may include:

- Background information on [Head Start's model and](#)
- NHSA's [National and State Fact Sheets](#) for the latest data and statistics on Head Start's impact across the country.
- Pictures and biographies of potential interviewees from *inside* your program. A parent or Policy Council member who is willing to share their story is a great place to start!
- Pictures and biographies of potential interviewees from *outside* your program who can sing your praises, like a community partner or local school leader.
- The latest information on your area of focus: data on [Early Head Start](#), access to [health services through Head Start](#), or something else in NHSA's [resource library](#).
- Talking points and suggested questions to help outline the message you want to convey.



Why is this important? If producers and editors don't have to dig for a compelling story, they are more likely to consider your pitch. If they feel like they have to do extra legwork, they are likely to pass.

Exemplar Head Start Stories in the Media

- [Screenings can change a child's life. In Mississippi, most young kids don't get them.](#)
- [Head Start not slowing down](#)
- [Caldwell Early Head Start program uses grant funding For gardening](#)
- [Resources for families with children with disabilities](#)

2. Develop your Message

Now it's time to brainstorm. If you were to write a headline for your story, what would it be? What is the main point you want the audience to learn? Write down several detailed talking points to support your message. These should be facts or statistics that demonstrate the impact of your program and also a story or two that bring it to life.

For tips on tailoring your message to specific audiences, you may find NHSA's [Head Start Language Playbook](#) helpful. For summaries of research about Head Start's positive impact on children and families, explore the [Head Start Advantage](#) one-pagers.



Why is this important? Preparation is key to successful communication. While you won't be able to script your story, having a well-thought-out goal in mind will help your main points get across.

3. Identifying your Media Outlets

After gathering your resources and developing your main messages, it's time to identify target local media outlets—the television stations, radio stations, newspapers, blogs, and other communications channels in your community.

Once you select the relevant media outlets, identify segment producers, program directors, or editors at those outlets. This step might take a little legwork because titles for those roles vary by outlet. Start by searching online for the producer or editor's contact information so you can make your pitch via email.

You can also call the news desk directly to ask them who you should receive your pitch. Don't be intimidated—simply ask for the name and email address for the segment producer or reporter who covers the education or community services beat.

Why is this important? It's all about the audience! Knowing your local media landscape will help to ensure you find the best audience for your message. Similarly, identifying and reaching out to the correct producer will improve your chances of successfully landing a story.



News Tip

Emails are the most effective way to pitch a story. Producers and reporters work in loud, distracting newsrooms, so while a phone call can help you identify a contact, do not pitch over the phone. Reporters and producers are flooded with more inquiries than they can handle. An informative, to-the-point email is the surest way to get a response.

4. Sending your Pitch

Once you have contact information for the producers or reporters who might be interested in your story, it's time to connect with them through a brief, well-written email. Here are the five key elements of your pitch email:

1. **Subject:** The email should have an easy-to-understand subject line. A subject line can make or break your pitch. Producers are flooded with emails daily, so a clear, concise subject line will stand out.
 - Example: "this Friday: early learning center hosts local Congresswoman"
 - Example: "Head Start Awareness Month in [insert your local community]."
 - Example: "Study: 85% of parents report paying more for child care in 2022"
2. **Intro:** State your name, your title, and your organization in the first sentence.
 - Example: "I'm Emily, director of communications for the National Head Start Association in Washington, D.C."
3. **Why:** Next, share—in just a sentence or two—why your story should be featured by the outlet. Producers want to know why your pitch matters to their audience and why the story is timely.
 - Example: "October is Head Start Awareness Month and I am writing to nominate a parent from our program who has a wonderful story to share."
4. **Details:** Provide background information, data, suggested questions for an interview segment along with any pictures, quotes, or video that support your story. Don't forget to link to any materials or sources that underscore the quantifiable impact Head Start is having locally.



News Tip

Don't forget to follow up! After you've pitched your story idea, the best way to follow up is through email. Forward your initial email (so all the resources and information are in the chain) and draft a brief email reminding the reporter or producers of the main idea for your story, why it matters to their audience, and what makes it timely.

Why is this important? Producers and reporters work on tight deadlines and often don't have the bandwidth to fully explore your story idea. Make it easier on them by sharing the resources you gathered in Step One. Your notes and research might be able to serve as an outline or influence the narrative the producer or reporter pursues.

5. Preparing for your Interview

Great job! Your pitch was accepted! Now what? You have already done all the research you need to prepare for your interview. Use the resources and talking points you gathered as your study guide. Review the talking points that support your message until you feel completely comfortable. On the day of the interview, there's only one thing to do...try to relax!

- **Get lots of rest the night before the interview.** Drink plenty of water. Use whatever calming techniques work for you, such as exercise or meditation.
- **First impressions go a long way.** Show up to the interview location a few minutes early. Professional clothing that's not too visually distracting is perfect for the camera.
- **Remember to breathe and stick to your talking points during the interview.** On the rare occasion the interviewer goes off script and asks a question you weren't prepared for, stay calm and guide the conversation back to your main message.

Why is this important? Relaxation is key to a successful and engaging interview. Since you pitched a specific story idea, the likelihood of the interviewer asking a question you are unprepared for is very slim. If you do find yourself in a trickier situation, don't be afraid to guide the conversation back to your key messages with a transitional phrase. Try: "It sounds like you're asking about ____" or "It's important to focus on ____."

6. Post-interview

After the interview, send a follow-up email thanking the media team. This will help to keep the lines of communication open for future initiatives.

Why is this important? Following up after the interview is crucial for continuing the relationship and building momentum for future stories. Relationship-building takes time and varies from person to person, so don't get discouraged if you don't hear back from the producer right away. Then, amplify it on social media, in emails to your community, in a post on your website, and with NHSA so we can post about it, too! [Email us](#) with your good news—and any questions you run into along the way.



News Tip

If you are misquoted in a print interview, email the reporter with the correct information. Hopefully, the error can be fixed. If you misspeak during a live interview, don't panic! Email and explain your error. Often the outlet publishes online. The producer may be able to correct the error.