

BREAKING THROUGH IN A CROWDED MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

Breaking through in a crowded media environment can be challenging. The good news is that it requires many of the best practices already referenced throughout this toolkit.

From an analysis of state news coverage on prenatal-to-three appropriations issues, a handful of clear themes rose to the top.

- **Make it human!** Storytelling is your key to solid media coverage. Stories are universal. They connect people to problems they've never personally experienced and have the ability to change hearts and minds. They also breathe life into news coverage, which is why journalists almost always offer insight into the "human impact" of a policy when describing it, either through a firsthand storyteller or another source who can speak to that impact. This means you must regularly identify, cultivate, and work with storytellers.
- **Make it relevant.** The news environment a journalist is working in is crucial to understand in order to make a well-tailored, strategic request. Based on their existing coverage, what is significant to them right now? How can you frame your issue as relevant within that context? New information, such as an unlikely or surprising statistic, can capture journalists' attention.
- **Make it timely.** Journalists have dozens of competing priorities, so spelling out "why now" is crucial. What makes your issue timely among the other top issues of the day?
- **Audience is key:** Make sure you understand where you want to break through. Based on an analysis of previous appropriations efforts, a few trends hold true across states.
 - ▶ There will almost always be a story to the effect of "Here's what made it into this year's budget" in local newspapers, particularly on the online edition of your local radio and television stations.
 - ▶ Outlets such as POLITICO and Axios (which have select state arms), Roll Call, and the local newspaper for your state's capital (e.g., the Sacramento Bee if you're in California) will be likelier to have reporters who dig into the weeds on appropriations and follow the process from the beginning instead of merely reporting back on the outcome.
 - ▶ Local political newsletters and blogs will follow the politics surrounding appropriations (e.g., digging into "why" some things are moving while others aren't).



TIP: Coverage on appropriations that breaks into standard news outlets (e.g., not wonky political blogs) almost always includes an anecdote from someone personally impacted alongside data. The equation to remember is "data + anecdotes = compelling story." [You can read more here](#) about crafting a media-worthy story.

- **Be mindful of the calendar.** The best time to start breaking through on appropriations is about 3 months before you need to secure press coverage. Dozens of organizations and coalitions are reaching out to reporters in the homestretch of the appropriations process, so you're putting yourself at a disadvantage if you're only beginning a week or two before the process is finalized. Ensure you understand the impact of media coverage on your inside game and time your press coverage to advance your overarching campaign goals.
- **Skip the jargon.** The word "appropriations" is one that instantly makes the average person lose focus — what does it mean? Why not use a simpler one? For example, you could say, "the funds that support child care and the care economy" or "investments in our children's future." While you may be an expert, keep in mind that the average reader isn't. Journalists who specialize in state budgets or policy have a higher tolerance for jargon but remember that it's essential to make your pitch interesting.
- **Back up your claims.** Whenever possible, share with journalists data that helps define the problem and identify your solution as the best path forward. Often, that requires demonstrating the scope of the problem (e.g., 1,275 babies died in Florida in 2021 — the first statistically significant increase in the U.S. infant mortality rate in over two decades).

