



# Earned Media Guide

AN OVERVIEW FOR QUITLINE PROGRAMS

**GOLIN**

# OVERVIEW / ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## About the Guide

This guide was created specifically for state and local government professionals working in tobacco control and quitline programs.

## How to Use This Resource

### *Who This Guide Is For:*

You'll find this guide most useful if you:

- Work for a state or local health department managing quitline communications
- Coordinate tobacco control efforts at the state or community level
- Handle media relations for public health programs with limited communications staff
- Need to navigate both journalism conventions and government approval processes
- Build sustainable earned media programs that adapt to leadership changes and budget constraints

### *Ways to Use This Guide:*

- **As a training resource:** New communications staff can read cover-to-cover to build foundational earned media knowledge specific to quitline work.
- **As a reference tool:** Experienced communicators can use specific sections as job aids, referencing the press release checklist when drafting releases, consulting the op-ed guidelines when pursuing editorial placement, or using media training frameworks when preparing spokespeople.
- **As a strategic planning guide:** Leadership teams can use this guide to assess current earned media capabilities, identify gaps, and develop multi-year communication strategies.
- **As a template library:** The guide includes templates, checklists, and frameworks you can adapt for your state or local program. These are meant to be customized to reflect your program's voice, your state's data, and your community's needs.

**A Note on Section 1:** Section 1 provides foundational context for those newer to public relations and communications. Experienced practitioners may wish to skim this section and proceed directly to the tactical guidance in Sections 2-11.

## Author and Contributors

This guide was developed through collaboration between the North American Quitline Consortium (NAQC) and Golin, a global communications firm with extensive experience in public health communications and tobacco control.

### *North American Quitline Consortium (NAQC)*

NAQC staff and members provided strategic direction, subject matter expertise on quitline operations, and extensive review to ensure the guide reflects current best practices in tobacco cessation communications.

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NAQC extends our sincere gratitude to NAQC reviewers of the earned media guide:

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## Disclosure of AI Assistance

Some content in this document was developed with the assistance of artificial intelligence (AI). Human oversight was applied to ensure accuracy, relevance, and appropriateness for quitline programs. All final decisions and interpretations remain the responsibility of the authors and contributors.

## Disclosure of Commercial vs. Traditional Tobacco Use

The use of the word “tobacco” in this guide refers to “commercial tobacco” or harmful products that are made and sold by tobacco companies. It does not include “traditional tobacco” some Indigenous groups use for religious or ceremonial purposes.

# GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Term	Definition
<b>Associated Press (AP) Stylebook</b>	The traditional and gold standard resource for media and journalists. While the expectation of adherence to AP style is waning, it is still a critical tool.
<b>Earned media</b>	When others spread awareness, news, feedback, or other information about your organization or program without paid support.
<b>Press Release</b>	A written, official statement distributed to news media announcing newsworthy information. Written in journalistic style (who, what, when, where, why, how).
<b>Boilerplate</b>	A standard paragraph (typically 50-75 words) about your organization that appears at the end of every press release.
<b>Op-ed</b>	Short for "opinion" or "opposite editorial," an op-ed is a longer-form opinion piece published in the opinion section of a newspaper and/or 'opposite' the editorial page.
<b>Letter to the editor (LTE)</b>	A short, written response submitted by a reader to a newspaper's letters section.
<b>Media Advisory</b>	A brief, fact-based alert notifying journalists of an upcoming newsworthy event.
<b>Pitch</b>	A personalized, concise proposal of a specific story idea sent to an individual journalist.
<b>Satellite Media Tour (SMT)</b>	A series of pre-scheduled, back-to-back broadcast interviews conducted from a single studio location.
<b>B-roll</b>	Supplemental video footage provided to television stations to support their news stories.
<b>Media Kit</b>	A comprehensive package of background information, facts, images, and resources about an organization or program.
<b>Sound bite/Actuality</b>	A brief, quotable statement (typically 7-12 seconds for broadcast) that conveys a complete thought.
<b>Embargo</b>	An agreement that news information can be shared in advance but cannot be published until a specific date and time.
<b>News Hook</b>	A timely, compelling element that makes a story relevant and newsworthy right now.
<b>Call to Action (CTA)</b>	A specific instruction telling audiences what action to take, such as "Call 1-800-QUIT-NOW."
<b>Spokesperson</b>	A trained individual authorized to speak on behalf of an organization to news media.
<b>Media Monitoring</b>	The systematic process of tracking, collecting, and analyzing media coverage.
<b>Key Messages</b>	The 3 core points you want audiences to remember and that spokespeople consistently communicate.
<b>Media Lists</b>	Curated databases of journalists, outlets, and contact information organized strategically for targeted outreach.

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## SECTION 1

# Introduction to Earned Media

# SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION TO EARNED MEDIA

The media landscape has changed significantly over the past decade, creating both challenges and opportunities for quitline programs. This section provides foundational understanding for developing an effective earned media strategy.

You'll learn what earned media is and why it matters for quitlines, how it differs from paid advertising and owned media channels, and how to build a strategic approach that generates consistent coverage. Experienced communications professionals may wish to skim this section and proceed to the guidance in Sections 2-11.

## 1.1 What is Earned Media?

Earned media is coverage your quitline receives through media outlets as a result of your outreach efforts, relationships, and newsworthy activities, not because you paid for placement. When a local television station runs a story about your quitline's services, when a newspaper publishes your program director's op-ed about youth vaping, or when a radio show interviews one of your counselors about the Great American Smokeout, that's earned media.



### PAID MEDIA

Placements you pay for directly (TV commercials, digital ads, print ads). You control the message completely but audiences recognize it as promotional.



### OWNED MEDIA

Content on channels you control (website, social media, newsletters). You control content but typically reach only people already aware of your organization.



### EARNED MEDIA

Third-party validation through editorial coverage. Journalists independently decide your work merits coverage, giving it different credibility characteristics

## State of the News Media

To earn media coverage effectively, you need to understand the current media environment. The landscape has changed significantly, and these changes affect how you approach outreach, what strategies work, and what challenges you'll encounter.

### Many More Outlets

Twenty years ago, most communities had a handful of news sources. Today, that same community likely has dozens of outlets, such as digital news sites, podcast networks, bloggers, and social media-based news sources competing for attention. This creates both opportunity and challenges.

This proliferation creates both opportunity and challenge. More outlets mean more potential placements for your quitline stories. However, it also means more competition for attention, as health departments, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies all compete for limited journalist attention and editorial space. Standing out requires strategic, targeted outreach rather than sending the same press release to everyone.

## Fewer Traditional Journalists

While outlets have multiplied, traditional journalism resources have contracted. Newsrooms employ far fewer reporters than they did a decade ago. Beat reporters who developed expertise in specific areas like health policy or public health, journalists who understood tobacco control issues and maintained ongoing relationships with quitline directors for extended periods, are less common. Instead, general assignment reporters often cover health stories one day, crime the next, and local government the day after, without specialized knowledge in any single area.

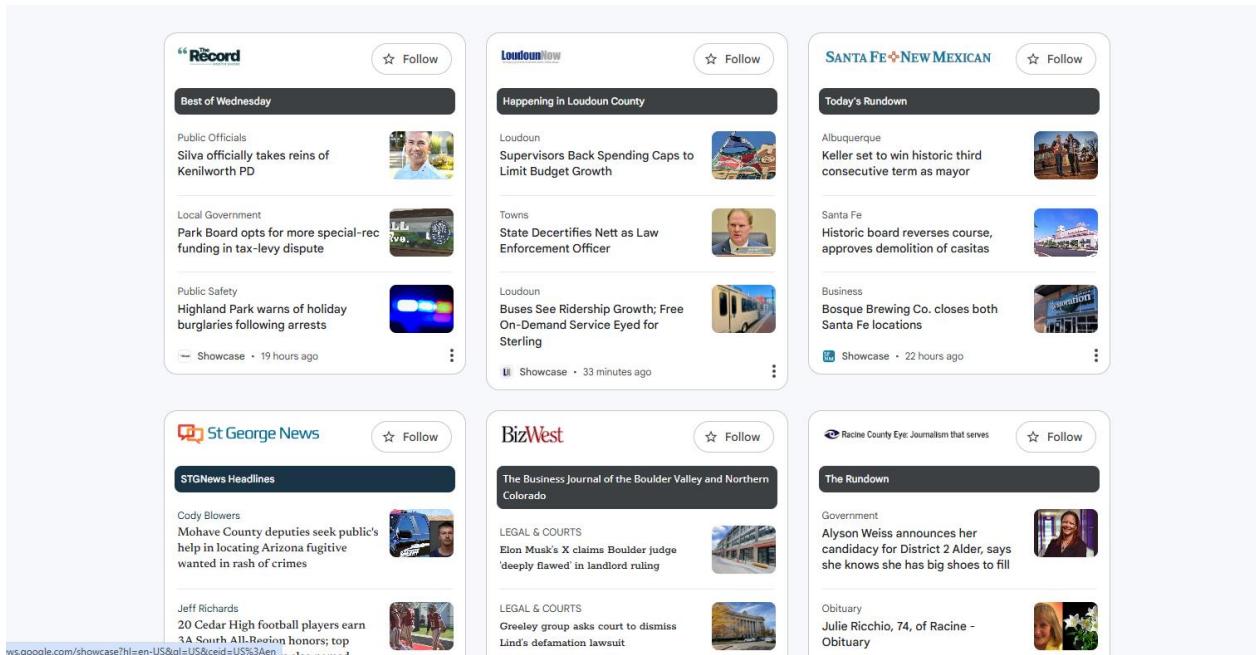
This means you'll often need to provide more education and context when pitching stories. You cannot assume reporters already understand tobacco cessation basics, quitline operations, or the public health significance of smoking rates. Providing background information and making journalists' jobs easier becomes more important when they're covering multiple beats without deep subject matter expertise.

## New Formats

New media formats have emerged that are important to understand as you develop your earned media strategy.

**Paid editorial represents advertiser-funded sections within publications, typically labeled as "Special Advertising Section" or "Sponsor Content." While these might occasionally serve your communication goals, they differ from earned media and don't carry the same credibility with audiences who increasingly recognize promotional content.**

News aggregators like Google News, Apple News, Flipboard, and Yahoo! News (see below) have changed how stories reach audiences. These platforms don't produce original reporting, they curate and redistribute content from other sources. You don't need to pitch aggregators separately; they find and distribute content automatically. This amplification potential makes securing placements in strong original sources more valuable.



## Why Earned Media Matters for Quitlines

Quitlines face an awareness challenge: many people who could benefit don't know these services exist. Many have heard vague references to "1-800-QUIT-NOW" but don't understand what quitlines offer, whether services are free or reduced cost, or that counseling and medication together significantly improve quit success.

Earned media addresses this gap directly. News coverage informs audiences about services they didn't know existed. Television segments show what happens when someone reaches out. Radio interviews address cost concerns. Each piece of coverage moves people from unaware to informed.

Beyond awareness, earned media can help build trust. Tobacco addiction carries stigma, and asking for help requires vulnerability. When local news sources present your quitline as a legitimate resource – and when reporters treat cessation support as important community health news – it can normalize help-seeking and reduce barriers that prevent people from calling.

Earned media can also create timely prompts for action. A news story about rising youth vaping rates that mentions your quitline's support for concerned parents may prompt calls from families. An interview timed to the Great American Smokeout reaches people when motivation may already be high. A feature story about a local resident's quit journey can demonstrate that others in the community have succeeded with support.

## 1.2 Strategic Value

### Benefits

#### *Credibility and Third-Party Validation*

Credibility and third-party validation are significant advantages of earned media. When journalists independently decide your quitline's work merits coverage, they're indicating your work is newsworthy and valuable to their audiences. Audiences often trust information delivered through editorial coverage differently than promotional messages. This trust can be particularly valuable for government programs, where public skepticism about efficiency may exist. A newspaper article showing that your quitline delivers strong quit rates and good return on investment carries different weight than your own promotional materials. The journalist's independent assessment serves as an endorsement that paid advertising cannot replicate.

#### *Cost-Effectiveness*

Cost-effectiveness makes earned media attractive for resource-constrained quitline programs. While staff investment in developing media relationships, creating press materials, coordinating interviews, and managing outreach is real, the return on this investment can exceed what equivalent paid advertising would deliver. A television news segment might reach hundreds of thousands of viewers at no direct cost beyond staff time preparing the spokesperson and coordinating the interview. Compare this to the thousands of dollars that purchasing even brief commercial time during those same newscasts would require and earned media's efficiency becomes clear. For programs operating with limited budgets, this cost advantage can be substantial.

#### *Building Community Trust*

Building community trust happens incrementally through sustained earned media presence. The first time someone sees news coverage of your quitline, they become aware you exist. Repeated exposure helps build recognition and familiarity. The third and fourth times create the legitimacy that makes people comfortable reaching out when they're ready to quit. This cumulative effect makes sustained earned media efforts valuable. Regular visibility builds recognition and trust that occasional coverage cannot match. Over time, consistent media presence establishes your quitline as an integral part of the community's health infrastructure.

## *Primary Source for AI*

As artificial intelligence tools become prevalent in health information searches, earned media serves as a primary source for AI systems. When someone asks an AI assistant "How can I get help quitting smoking in [your state]?" the system draws upon publicly available content including news articles, published reports, and digital coverage.

Unlike paid advertising or owned media content that AI systems may filter out, editorial news coverage typically carries more weight in how AI systems evaluate and present information. Your earned media efforts create a public record that AI systems reference when directing people to cessation resources.

This doesn't mean you should pursue earned media primarily to inform AI systems. You're pursuing media to reach audiences directly. However, digital news coverage provides an additional benefit: it ensures that tomorrow's information-seekers using AI assistants receive accurate information about your services.

## **Limitations**

### *Control*

Unlike paid advertising where you determine exact messaging, earned media involves journalists making independent editorial decisions about whether to cover your story, which angles to emphasize, which quotes to include, how prominently to feature your quitline number, and when coverage runs. You can influence these decisions through strong relationships, compelling materials, and skilled interviews, but you cannot control them completely.

### *Scale and Reach*

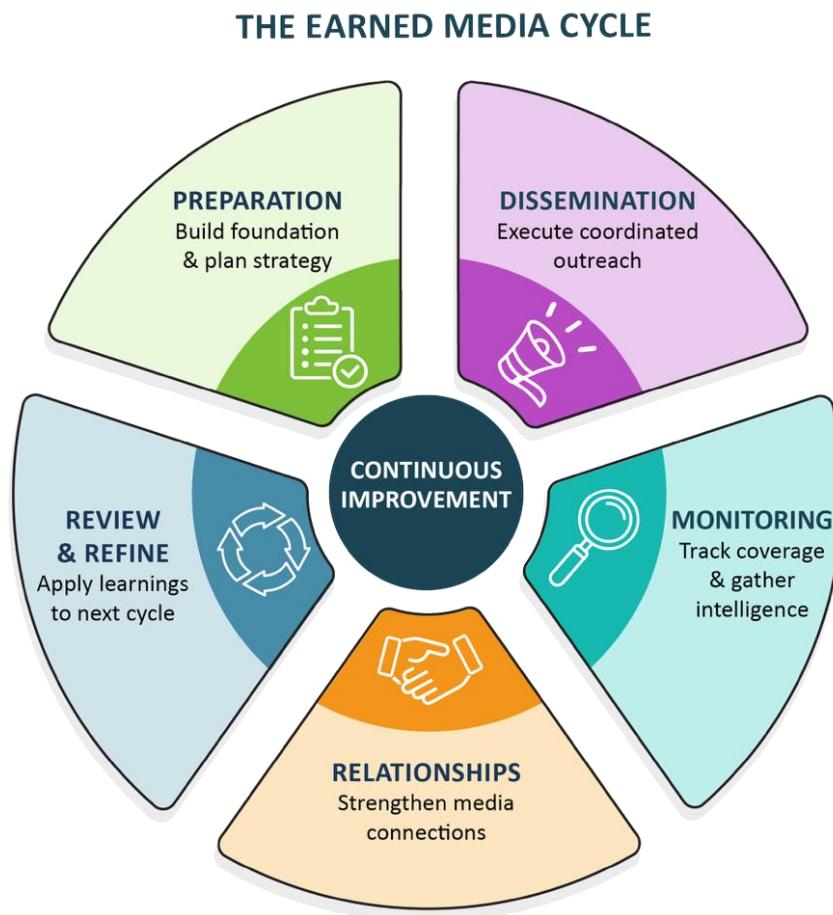
Paid campaigns can be more precisely calibrated to reach specific demographic groups in particular geographic areas with guaranteed frequency. Earned media operates less predictably. You might secure excellent coverage in urban areas but struggle to generate rural news stories despite equal effort. Some population segments might encounter earned media about your quitline regularly while others remain underexposed despite being priority populations. These gaps may require paid media or other complementary tactics.

### *Targeting*

With earned media, you can pitch to outlets serving certain communities, but you can't guarantee the people who most need your services will see coverage. A broadcast interview might reach hundreds of thousands, including many of non-smokers. This is why earned media works best as part of an integrated strategy with more targeted paid and owned channels. These limitations don't diminish earned media's value, they contextualize it. Effective quitline communication strategies typically combine earned, paid, and owned channels strategically.

## 1.3 The Earned Media Cycle

Effective earned media follows a continuous five-phase cycle. Each cycle strengthens your program's effectiveness—your tenth campaign will operate at a completely different level than your first.



### Phase 1: Preparation

Build your foundation before launching outreach. Conduct a materials audit to identify gaps. Clarify your goals with specific, measurable objectives. Develop your strategic calendar mapping opportunities months in advance. Finalize message maps and prepare spokespersons before media expresses interest.

*For detailed guidance on materials preparation, see Section 3. For editorial calendar development, see Section 6. For spokesperson preparation, see Section 9.*

### Phase 2: Dissemination

Execute coordinated outreach across multiple channels simultaneously. Distribute press releases strategically, pitch personalized story ideas to targeted journalists, coordinate spokesperson interviews rapidly, and engage with journalists on social media.

*For detailed guidance on press release distribution, see Section 3.3. For pitching strategies, see Section 8. For social media engagement, see Section 7.*

## Phase 3: Monitoring

Track coverage systematically across all media types. Assess message accuracy and pull-through. Document media interactions to extract tactical intelligence. Correlate coverage with quitline call volume to demonstrate impact.

*For detailed guidance on monitoring systems and metrics, see Section 10.*

## Phase 4: Relationships

Build ongoing professional connections with journalists based on mutual benefit. Provide value between pitches by sharing relevant data, connecting reporters with expert sources, and responding quickly to all inquiries. Strong relationships yield reporters contacting you first when tobacco stories break. This takes time to pay off, but it will sustain and enhance your earned media efforts. In addition, you will begin to see the amount of coverage increase.

Before connecting with any journalist, do your homework. Read their recent articles (or listen to their podcasts, watch their broadcast segments, etc.) to understand their beat coverage and style. Note which topics they cover frequently. Identify their outlet's audience and geographic focus. Check their social media presence for interests and communication preferences. This preparation ensures your outreach feels personalized rather than generic.

*For detailed guidance on relationship building, see Section 9.4. For social media relationship strategies, see Section 7.1.*

## Phase 5: Review & Refine

Extract lessons from each campaign to inform the next. Assess performance against objectives. Analyze what worked and what didn't. Identify gaps in materials, spokespersons, or relationships. Apply learnings systematically so improvements become automatic.

*For detailed guidance on evaluation and continuous improvement, see Section 10.2.*

## 1.4 Press Materials Basics

Each type of press material serves a distinct purpose and follows specific conventions journalists expect. Using the right tool for the right situation increases your likelihood of coverage.

Material Type	Key Characteristics
Press Releases	300-500 words. Official announcement distributed broadly. Standard structure: headline, dateline, lead paragraph, spokesperson quotes, boilerplate, media contact.
Media Advisories	One page or less. Factual alert about upcoming events. Bullet-point format answering who/what/when/where/why.
Media Pitches	3-5 paragraphs maximum. Personalized email to individual journalist. Tailored to reporter's beat and audience.
Op-Eds	600-800 words. Opinion piece taking a position, published in newspaper editorial section.
Letters to the Editor	150-300 words. Short, personal response to current issues.

## Spokesperson Availability Releases

Formatted like a media advisory, 1 page document announcing qualified experts available for media interviews, comments, or background briefings.

**For detailed guidance on creating and distributing each material type, see Sections 3-5.**

Understanding these fundamental tools provides the foundation for effective earned media outreach. As you develop your communications strategy, you'll learn which tools work best for which stories and audiences. Remember to integrate these with your owned and social efforts can and should be shared across various channels once published.

Remember to integrate these with your owned and social efforts. For example, an op-ed can and should be shared across various channels once it has run.

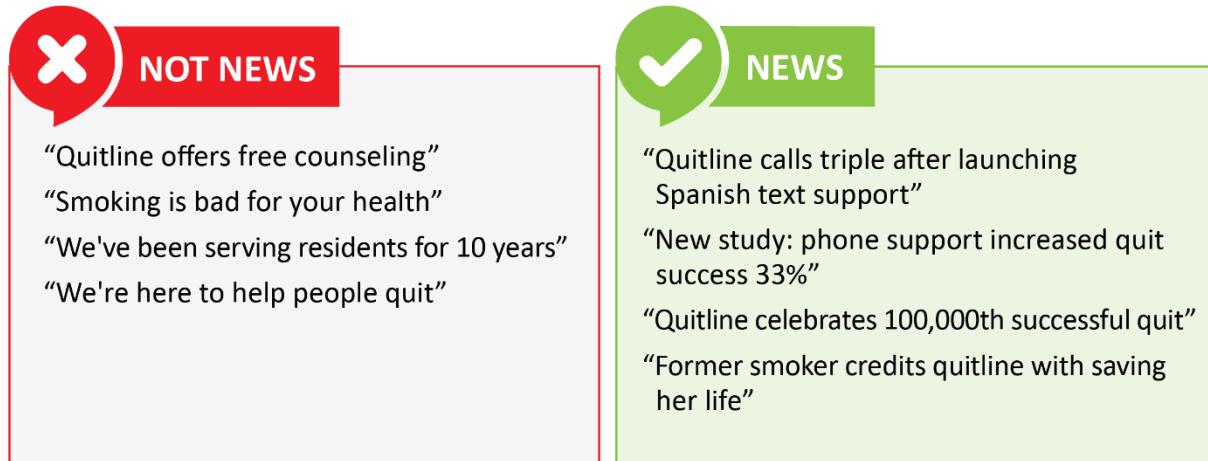
## 1.5 Setting Your Foundation

Before launching any earned media campaign, address four strategic questions: What makes your story newsworthy? Who needs to hear it? Is your organization ready? How will you measure success?

### Defining Your Newsworthy Angles

Hard truth: most of what organizations want to announce isn't news. "Quitline offers free counseling" describes your everyday work. "Quitline calls triple after launching Spanish-language text support" is news—something changed.

#### IS THIS NEWS OF THE DAY... OR JUST ANOTHER DAY?"



Two quick tests for genuine news:

- **The reverse-engineer test:** Can you craft a realistic headline in your target outlet's style? If not, you're not ready to pitch.
- **The "so what?" test:** Would your neighbor care? Would it change anyone's behavior?

**For comprehensive guidance on newsworthiness elements, see Section 8.1.**

## Understanding Your Target Media

Map outlets by how effectively they reach your specific audience, not just by size or prestige. A community newspaper serving neighborhoods with high smoking rates may deliver better results than a major daily. Learn each outlet's geographic coverage, demographic focus, and content preferences.

### MATCH YOUR STORY TO THE RIGHT OUTLET



### Build systematic intelligence about your media landscape.

- Track which reporters cover public health regularly versus occasionally.
- Note which outlets run health features versus only breaking news. Identify the “media that media follow.” These are outlets that set your region’s news agenda, often the major daily newspapers.
- Monitor editorial positions on public health issues.
- Follow key reporters on social media to understand their interests beyond published work.
- Create reporter profiles documenting recent stories, preferred contact methods, deadline patterns, typical sources, and favored formats.

### CAPITOL PRESS CORPS:

Each state has a dedicated team of reporters and media outlets assigned to cover state policy and politics. This group is particularly important for public health professionals. There is often a resource online that will describe your state’s Capitol Press Corps and list reporters and media outlets. Make sure that you’re engaging and developing relationships with these key reporters and tracking their stories.

For detailed guidance on building and maintaining media lists, see Section 3.3.

## Assessing Organizational Readiness

Before launching, ensure you have: a designated PR contact with decision-making authority, clear approval processes enabling same-day responses, basic media monitoring, identified and briefed spokespeople, and documented approved key messages.

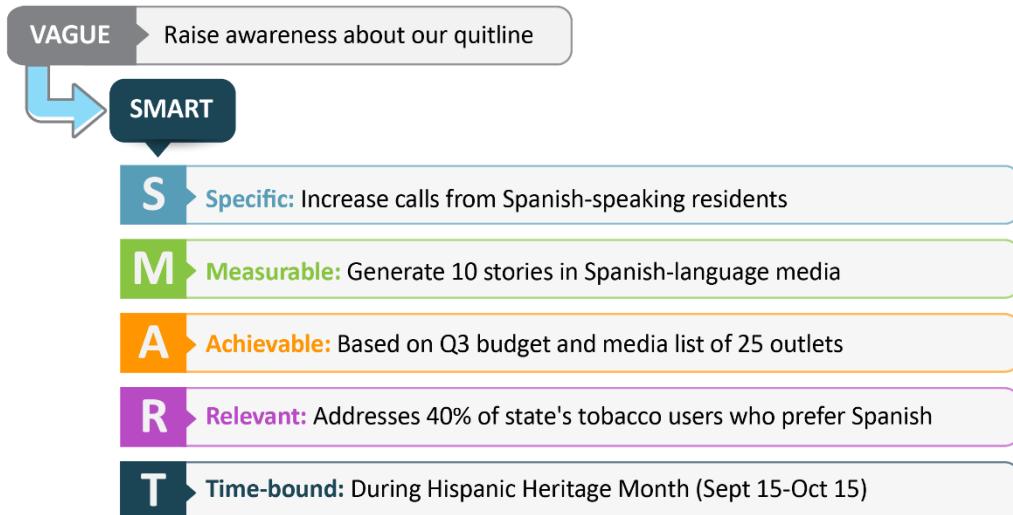
## Establishing Goals and Metrics

In section 1.3 we discussed goals. Just as earned media is not a goal, "raise awareness" is not a goal, it's a vague aspiration providing neither tactical guidance nor success measurement.

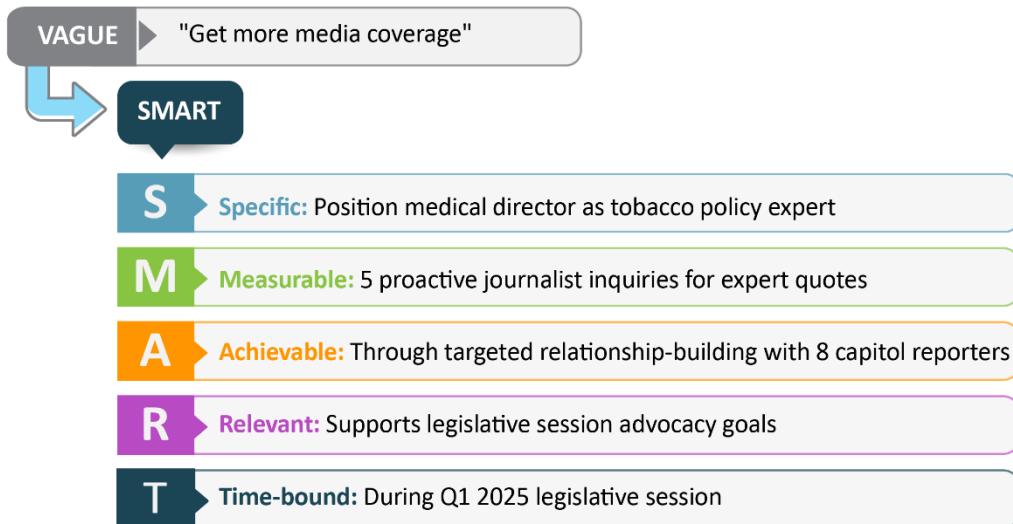
Well-defined goals might include generating 15 earned media stories during Great American Smokeout month, achieving 80% positive sentiment in tobacco-related coverage, increasing quitline calls by 25% following major media placements, or building relationships with five new health reporters quarterly. Each goal provides clear targets enabling performance assessment.

### THE SMART GOALS FRAMEWORK

#### EXAMPLE 1:



#### EXAMPLE 2:



*For detailed guidance on tracking metrics and evaluating success, see Section 10.2.*

*A note about ethics:*

There are guidelines to help media relations professionals understand the importance of ethics and how to act ethically in their work. We would recommend reviewing these in greater detail. There are several resources available, but a good starting place is the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA): [Ethics for an Evolving Profession](#).

## SECTION 2

# Resources

## SECTION 2: RESOURCES

This section includes a curated list of professional resources to support earned media planning, execution, and continuous improvement. These resources include professional associations that offer training and networking opportunities, federal guidelines for accessible and effective communications, and evidence-based frameworks that can strengthen the strategic foundation of your earned media efforts. While no single resource can address every situation, this collection represents foundational tools that can help quitlines build credibility, ensure compliance, and connect with the broader public health communications community.

### Professional Associations & Networks

Organization Name	Value	How to Use
<b>American Public Health Association (APHA)</b>	Provides evidence-based public health communications frameworks and connects practitioners across health topics	Attend annual meetings to present your work, learn cutting-edge tactics, and network with potential partners and spokespeople
<b>Associated Press (AP) Stylebook</b>	The traditional and gold standard resource for media and journalists. While the expectation of adherence to AP style is waning it is still a critical tool	An annual subscription to <a href="#">AP Stylebook</a> is available online (~\$30-\$50) and regularly updated. It is a fantastic resource that can accentuate this document. Also recommend following AP Style on social media
<b>Association of State and Territory Health Officials (ASTHO)</b>	Connects state and territorial public health leaders and communicators working on tobacco control and other health priorities; provides policy guidance and technical assistance	Access their communications resources and toolkits specific to state health departments; participate in their tobacco control workgroups and peer learning networks; leverage their policy briefs and best practice documents to support advocacy efforts
<b>National Association of County &amp; City Health Officials (NACCHO)</b>	Connects state and local public health communicators working on similar health promotion issues	Access their communications toolkits, join their communications workgroups, and learn from peer health departments' campaigns
<b>Public Relations Society of America (PRSA)</b>	Provides professional development, ethical standards, and best practices for strategic communications	Leverage their library of case studies, webinars on emerging tactics, and local chapter events for professional development and vendor identification
<b>National Association of Government Communicators (NAGC)</b>	Specifically focused on public sector communications challenges including limited budgets, transparency requirements, and public accountability	Access trainings on crisis communications, plain language, and digital engagement strategies tailored to government contexts; network with peers facing similar resource constraints
<b>Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ)</b>	Offers insights into journalistic standards and expectations, helping quitlines understand what makes stories newsworthy to reporters	Review their ethics code to understand journalist perspectives when crafting pitches; attend regional chapters for relationship-building

## Federal Guidelines & Best Practices

Resource Name	Value	How to Use
<b>ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) Compliance Resources</b> <a href="https://www.ada.gov/resources/effective-communication/">https://www.ada.gov/resources/effective-communication/</a>	Ensures your communications are accessible in format, language, and delivery method to all community members	Review guidance when planning press events, media trainings, and public presentations; ensure all visual content includes alt text and transcripts
<b>CDC Best Practices for Comprehensive Tobacco Control Programs—2014</b> <a href="https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/phb/state-and-community-work/guides-for-states.html">https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/phb/state-and-community-work/guides-for-states.html</a>	The authoritative, evidence-based framework for comprehensive tobacco control programs, including the research foundation for why earned media tactics work	Cite this document when justifying budget requests, developing strategic plans, or explaining tactical approaches to leadership; use the Mass-Reach Health Communication Interventions section to support your earned media strategy
<b>CDC Clear Communication Index &amp; Plain Language Resources</b> <a href="https://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/Clear_Communication_Index.html">https://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/Clear_Communication_Index.html</a>	Ensures your communications materials are understandable and actionable for diverse audiences, improving message effectiveness	Apply the Clear Communication Index checklist to all press releases, fact sheets, and public-facing materials before distribution; use as a training tool for staff and partners
<b>Section 508 Accessibility Standards</b> <a href="https://www.section508.gov/">https://www.section508.gov/</a>	Federal standards ensuring digital content is accessible to people with disabilities; increasingly required for government-funded programs	Apply 508 compliance requirements when developing all digital content including websites, PDFs, social media graphics, and video content; use the testing tools to evaluate existing materials

## Media & Journalism Resources

Organization Name	Value (Why This Matters)	How to Use
<b>Association of Health Care Journalists (AHCJ)</b>	Connects you with journalists who specialize in health topics and understand the complexities of health communications	Monitor their tip sheets and story ideas to understand what health reporters are covering; attend their conferences to build relationships with health journalists

Organization Name	Value (Why This Matters)	How to Use
<b>Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA)</b>	Helps quitlines understand broadcast journalism standards and best practices for providing broadcast-ready materials	Review their resources on news values and story formats when developing B-roll, video news releases, or broadcast pitches

## News Monitoring & Media Intelligence Tools

Tool Name	Value (Why This Matters)	How to Use	Cost Required
<b>Google Alerts</b>	Free tool that provides automated notifications when specific keywords appear in online news, helping quitlines stay aware of tobacco-related coverage and emerging issues	Set up alerts for tobacco-related terms, quitline mentions, competitor activities, and key spokespeople; use daily digest settings to avoid alert fatigue; refine search terms based on relevance of results	N
<b>Muck Rack</b>	Media database and monitoring platform that helps track journalists covering tobacco/health topics, monitor media coverage, and discover earned media opportunities	Build and maintain media lists of health reporters; track coverage of your quitline and tobacco topics; identify journalists' recent work and interests before pitching; measure earned media impact with coverage reports	Y
<b>Critical Mention or TVEyes</b>	Broadcast monitoring services that track TV and radio coverage, essential for capturing the full scope of earned media beyond print/online outlets	Set up keyword alerts for quitline mentions, tobacco topics, and campaign themes; capture broadcast clips for internal reporting and stakeholder updates; analyze which broadcast markets are covering tobacco issues most frequently	Y
<b>Talkwalker or Brandwatch</b>	Social listening and media monitoring platforms that track conversations across social media, news sites, blogs, and forums to identify trends and reactive opportunities	Monitor tobacco-related conversations and sentiment; identify emerging issues before they become mainstream news; track campaign hashtags and social media mentions; discover influencers and advocates discussing cessation	Y

Tool Name	Value (Why This Matters)	How to Use	Cost Required
Cision or Meltwater	Comprehensive media monitoring and intelligence platforms that track coverage across all channels and provide detailed analytics on reach and message pull-through	Generate coverage reports for stakeholders; analyze sentiment and key message inclusion in coverage; benchmark earned media performance over time; identify high-value media outlets and reporters for relationship building	Y
NewsWhip	Predictive analytics tool that identifies trending stories and topics gaining momentum, allowing quitlines to react quickly to relevant news cycles	Monitor health and tobacco topics gaining traction; identify reactive earned media opportunities before stories peak; understand which story angles are resonating with audiences; time your pitches to align with news momentum	Y

## SECTION 3

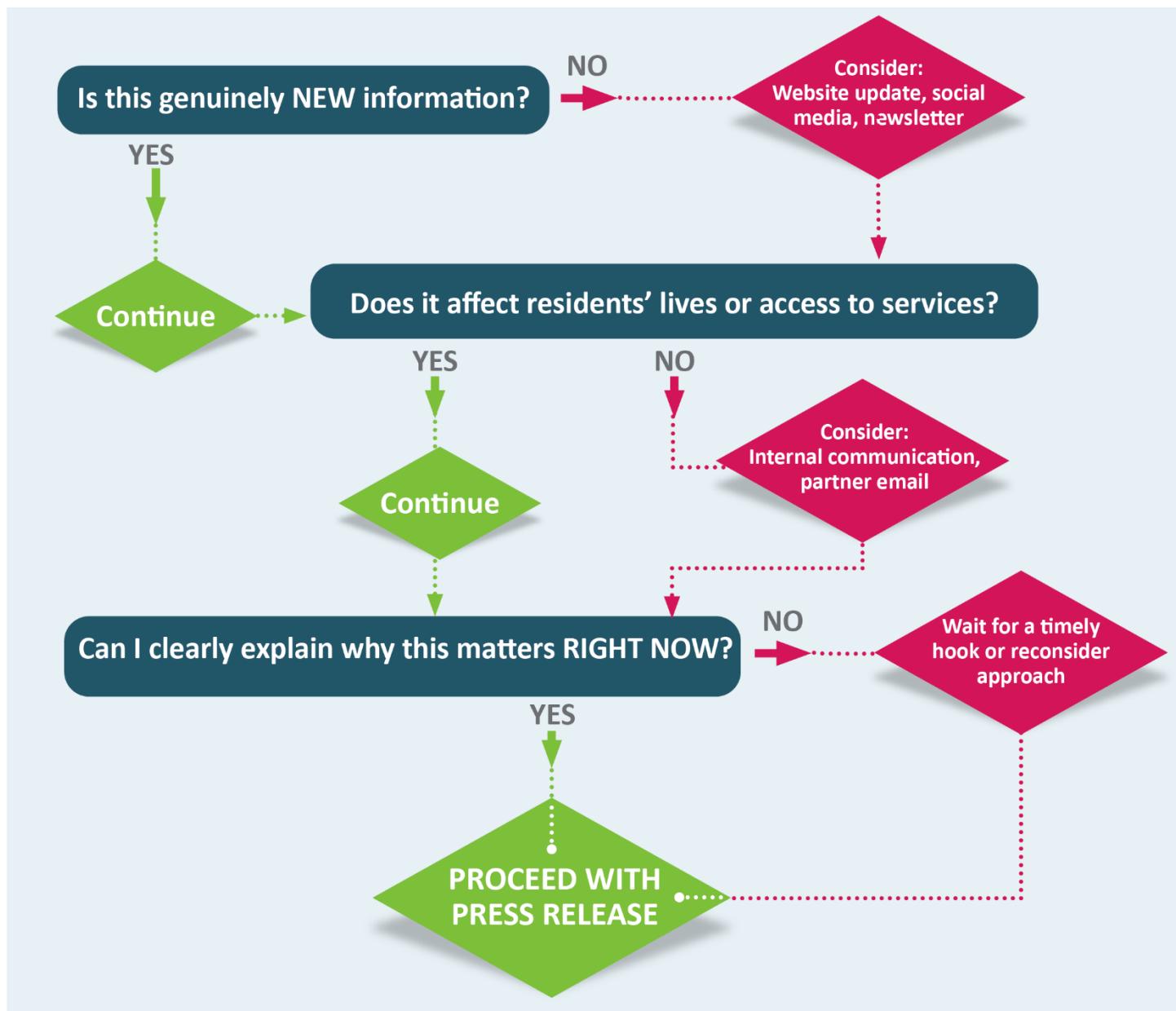
# Press Releases

## SECTION 3: PRESS RELEASES

Press releases remain a fundamental earned media tool, but in government settings they require navigating both journalism conventions and internal approval processes. As a public health communicator, it's important to ensure you're balancing competing pressures, elected officials who want visibility, supervisors who need to approve messaging, limited time to execute, and journalists who need newsworthy content.

### 3.1 When to Issue a Press Release

Your most important decision happens before you write anything: Is this newsworthy, or should you use a different communication channel?



### **When Releases Work Well:**

- New service launches (24/7 text support, extended hours, additional languages)
- Significant data releases (smoking rates changed  $\geq 10\%$ , concerning youth trends)
- Major partnerships (healthcare system integrations, employer programs)
- Policy changes affecting resident access
- Strategic observances with local angle
- Compelling success stories with timely news hook

### **When to Use Other Tactics:**

- Existing services with no changes
- Staff promotions or internal updates
- Routine data releases with no significant change
- Generic awareness messages without news hook

### **Political Reality Check:**

If your elected official wants to issue a release announcing routine services, you have a few options:

- **Reframe with a news hook:** "Ahead of Great American Smokeout, [Official] highlights free cessation resources available to residents"
- **Suggest alternatives:** "We could post this on social media and you could share from your accounts for greater reach"
- **Provide context:** "Media typically don't cover this type of announcement, but we could explore op-ed placement or interviews instead"
- **Time-Saving Truth:** One well-timed release about genuinely newsworthy content generates more coverage than five releases about routine activities. Protect your credibility by being selective.

## **3.2 Creating an Effective Press Release**

### **Essential Elements (In Order of Importance)**

#### **1. Headline - Make or Break Moment**

Journalists decide whether to read further based on your headline.

**X** Government tendency: "Department of Health Announces New Program"

**✓** What works: "State Launches 24/7 Text Support for Spanish-Speaking Tobacco Users"

**Formula:** [Specific Change/Finding] + [Impact on Residents]

#### **2. Opening Paragraph - WHO/WHAT/WHEN/WHERE/WHY in 50 Words**

**X** Government tendency: "The Department of Health is pleased to announce the launch of an innovative new program designed to provide enhanced cessation support services..."

**✓** What works: "[STATE] tobacco users can now access free quit coaching via text message 24/7, the Health Department announced today, removing a major barrier for people who can't call during business hours."

#### **3. Spokesperson Quotes**

Quotes shouldn't repeat facts already stated. They provide perspective and emotion.

**X** Weak: "We are excited to launch this new text messaging program," said [Name].

**✓** Strong: "Parents working two jobs told us they wanted to quit but couldn't call during our hours. This text service means we're available when they need us," said [Name].

## QUOTE FORMULA

What we heard from community

+

How we're responding

+

Why it matters

Write quotes on how people talk. Read them aloud. If they sound stiff, rewrite.

### 4. Call to Action - Critical

Include prominently: "Call 1-800-QUIT-NOW for free coaching and medication" or "Text QUIT to [number] for immediate support." Position in both the release body AND the boilerplate.

### 5. Boilerplate - Write Once, Use Everywhere

Draft once, get approved, use verbatim in every release:

*"The [State] Tobacco Quitline provides free, confidential support to help [State] residents quit tobacco. Services include personalized coaching, free nicotine replacement therapy, text messaging support, and online resources. All [State] residents ages 13 and older can access services regardless of insurance status. For more information, call 1-800-QUIT-NOW or visit [website]."*

#### Format Standards:

Element	Specification	Why It Matters
Length	300-500 words max	Journalists won't read beyond 2 pages
Style	AP Style	Industry standard, shows professionalism
Person	Third person	"Health Department announced" not "We announced"
Dateline	[CITY, STATE] – [DATE] –	Signals where/when news originates
End marker	###	Journalism convention signaling completion of the content; boilerplate and other information goes under the "###"
Contact	Name, title, direct phone, email	At top of release, not buried at bottom

# GOVERNMENT PRESS RELEASE CHECKLIST

## SECTION 1: Before Writing

- Confirmed this is newsworthy (passed 3-question test)
- Identified required approvers and timeline
- Gathered all facts, statistics, quotes needed
- Pre-cleared sensitive information or claims

## SECTION 2: During Writing

- Headline is specific and under 10 words
- Opening paragraph answers who/what/when/where/why in ~50 words
- Spokesperson quote adds perspective (not repetition)
- Clear call to action with specific contact methods
- Third person throughout, AP style
- Statistics include sources
- No claims you can't support with evidence
- Appropriate elected official attribution

## SECTION 3: Before Submitting for Approval

- Spell-check and grammar check completed
- All names/titles verified correct
- Contact information is current
- Boilerplate included
- Attachments/photos ready (if applicable)

## SECTION 4: Before Distribution

- Final approvals secured
- Media list updated
- Timing avoids holidays/breaking news
- Spokesperson briefed and available
- Tracking system ready

## What to Do When Leadership Wants Changes:

Common requests and how to address them:

- **"Make it sound more exciting"** → Keep factual tone but strengthen the opening paragraph and headline with specifics "
- **"Add more about our accomplishments"** → Suggest a separate fact sheet as background; keep release focused on the news
- **"Include more about me"** → Attribute the announcement appropriately but keep focus on community impact
- **"This makes us look bad"** → Reframe challenges as responses to needs or opportunities to improve

## 3.3 Distributing a Press Release

How you distribute releases matters as much as what's in them. Your goal isn't just sending information, it's building relationships with journalists who will cover your work fairly over time.

### Distribution Channel Priority Order:

#### 1. Direct Outreach to Key Reporters (Highest Impact)

Your personal media list is your most valuable asset.

## **Building Your Media List:**

- Start with reporters who've covered health topics in past six months
- Include general assignment reporters at small outlets
- Add assignment editors at TV/radio stations
- Note each person's beat, contact preferences, and deadline patterns
- Update quarterly as reporters change beats/jobs

## **The Tiers Approach:**

- **Tier 1 (Priority):** Major outlets with largest reach, outlets reaching priority populations, media that have covered you positively. These receive personalized pitches and first access to exclusive stories.
- **Tier 2 (Secondary):** Outlets that cover you occasionally, niche outlets, smaller newspapers. These receive standard press releases with some personalization.
- **Tier 3 (Broad):** Very small or specialized outlets, new outlets you're evaluating. These receive wire service distribution or mass emails ("bcc"/hide your distribution list!).

**Critical reality:** Journalist turnover is extremely high. Online databases like Muck Rack and Cision provide constantly updated contact information but cost more than maintaining your Excel spreadsheets. Update your lists at least quarterly and before any major outreach.

## **TEMPLATE FOR DIRECT EMAIL:**

Subject: [Specific, newsworthy headline]

Hi [Name],

[One sentence on why this is relevant to their beat or recent coverage]

[Your state] just [specific action] that [specific impact on their audience].

Key details:

- [Most important detail]
- [Second most important detail]

I can arrange interviews with [spokesperson+title] if you're interested. [add a short summary of credentials if needed]

[Your name]

[Direct phone]

## **2. State Government Channels**

- State press office distribution lists
- Health department distribution systems
- Official state newsroom websites

## **3. Strategic Partners**

Partners with their own media relationships can amplify reach: American Lung Association, American Cancer Society, hospital systems, community organizations, etc.

## **4. Paid Wire Services (Selective Use)**

Services like PR Newswire cost \$300-\$3,000+ per release. Best for 1-2 major annual announcements; not worth the cost for routine announcements.

### Template/"Swiss Cheese" Releases

Template releases are pre-written with customizable sections that partners can adapt with their specific information. Useful for coordinated observance campaigns, statewide initiatives, or partner resources.

#### When to Use:

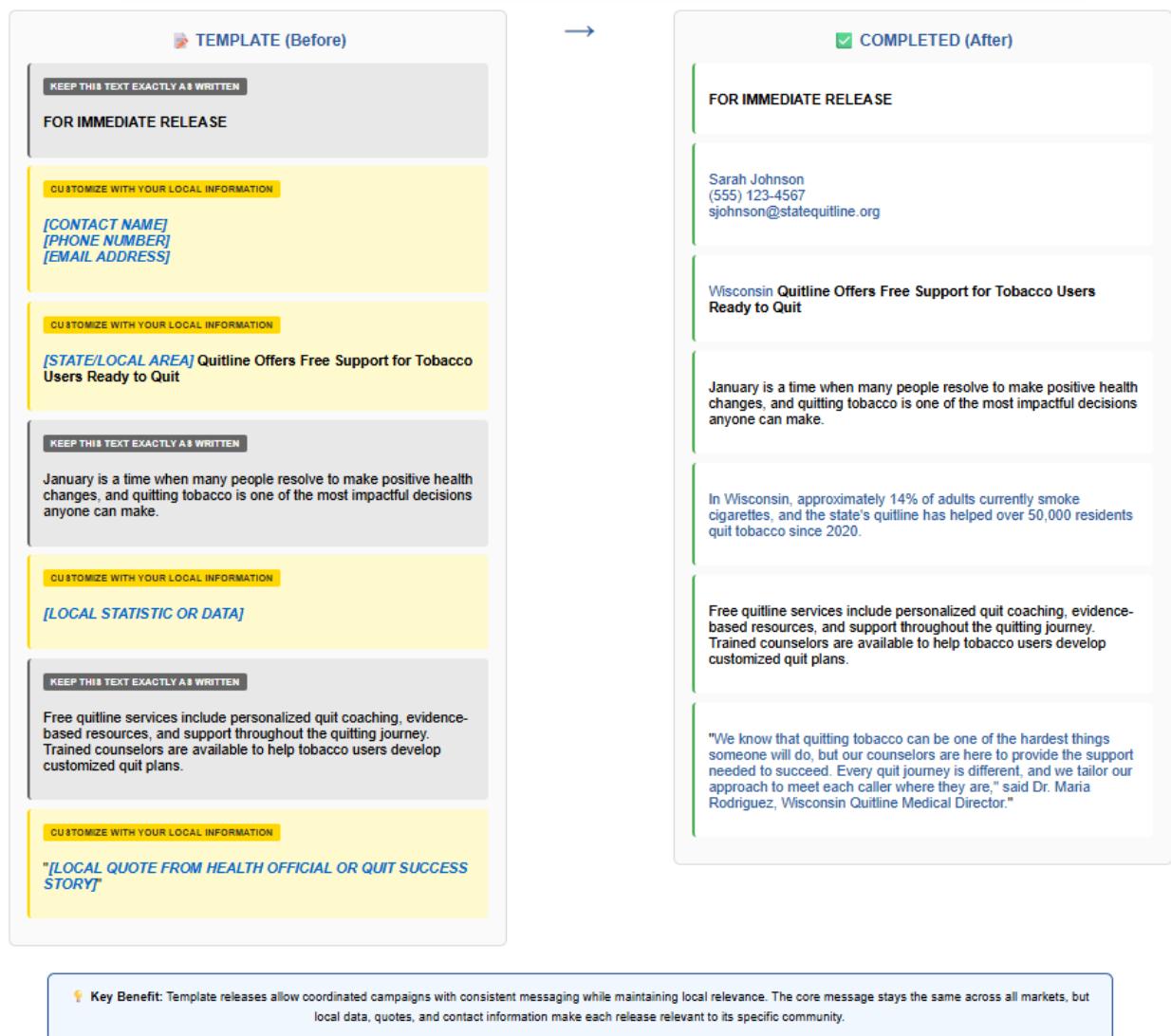
- Health observances (Great American Smokeout, World No Tobacco Day)
- Multiple local health departments announcing the same program
- Healthcare systems promoting quitline services

#### How to Create:

1. Identify what stays consistent (core facts, statistics, boilerplate)
2. Identify what needs customization (local data, quotes from local officials, contact info)
3. Provide clear instructions on which sections should NOT be changed

See *Template "Swiss Cheese" Press Release in addendum section.*

## HOW TEMPLATE RELEASES WORK: CONSISTENT CORE MESSAGE + LOCAL RELEVANCE



## 3.4 Tips & Tricks

### Understanding Newsdesks: Your TV and Radio Strategy

For television and radio coverage, understanding how newsrooms operate helps you target the right people.

#### What Is a Newsdesk/Assignment Desk?

The newsdesk is staffed by assignment editors who decide which stories get covered and which reporters get assigned. They're the gatekeepers. Even if you have a relationship with a specific reporter, your release still needs to go through the assignment desk.

##### For Television Stations:

- Send to assignment desk email (usually under "News Tips" on station website)
- Lead with visuals: "We have someone available for interview" and "This story has strong visuals"
- Timing: Morning assignment meetings happen 9-10 AM. Get releases in one day before then again for same-day consideration.

##### Example assignment desk pitch:

Subject: VISUAL: State Launches 24/7 Text Support - Spokesperson & B-roll Available

Assignment Desk,

[State] just launched 24/7 text message support for tobacco users, and we have strong visuals.

Available today:

- [Spokesperson name] - available 1-4 PM for on-camera interview
- Former smoker who quit using text support - available 2-3 PM
- B-roll of text platform in action

Contact: [Your name and direct cell phone]

##### For Radio Stations:

- Send to news director or assignment desk
- Emphasize audio opportunities: "Available for phone or in-studio interview"

##### Optimal Timing

- **Best:** Tuesday-Thursday, 8:00-10:00 AM
- **Avoid:** Monday mornings, Fridays after noon, after 3:00 PM any day, major holidays ± 2 days, during breaking news

## WORKING WITH TV/RADIO ASSIGNMENT DESKS

### SECTION 1: Who to Contact

TV Stations ➤ Assignment Desk (check station website for email/phone)

Radio Stations ➤ News Director or Assignment Desk

Don't pitch individual reporters unless you have existing relationship

### SECTION 3: Best Times to Reach Them

 **9-10AM** Best Time (assignment meetings)

 **10 AM-3 PM** They're busy in field

 **3-6PM** Too late for today

 **After Hours** Breaking News Only

### SECTION 2: What They Need to Know (In Priority Order)

- 1 ➤** What's newsworthy about this? (one sentence)
- 2 ➤** What visuals/interviews are available?
- 3 ➤** When is the spokesperson available?
- 4 ➤** Where can crews go to film/record?

### SECTION 4: Email Template: Subject: [Specific, visual hook]

Hi [Station] Assignment Desk,  
[One sentence describing the news and why it's visual/important]  
Available today:

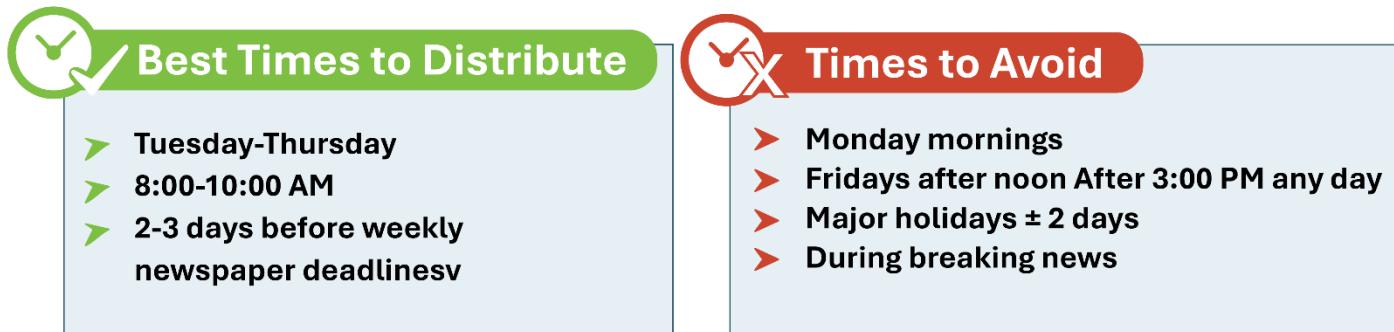
- [Spokesperson] - available [time]
- [Visuals or interview subjects]
- [Location/logistics if relevant]

Contact: [Name and cell phone]

## Follow-Up Strategy:

Scenario	Follow-Up Approach
Major release to Tier 1 outlets	Brief call or email 24-48 hours later
Routine release	No follow-up unless journalist specifically requests
Time-sensitive	Follow up same day if no response by 2 PM
Coverage published	Thank reporter via brief email same day

## QUICK REFERENCE CARD: PRESS RELEASE TIMING & FOLLOW-UP



### FOLLOW UP DECISION TREE

Is this a major announcement to a priority outlet?

NO

Did the journalist specifically request follow-up?"

NO

YES

No follow-up needed

Follow up as requested

### FOLLOW UP

Hi [Name],  
wanted to check if you received our release about [topic]  
and see if you'd like additional information or interviews  
with [spokesperson]. Let me know if this fits your  
coverage plans."

### When Things Go Wrong:

- **Coverage emphasizes unintended angle:** Accept gracefully. Learn for next time.
- **Coverage contains factual errors:** Contact reporter promptly with correction and source.
- **No coverage despite strong release:** Don't take it personally. Try different angle next time.

SECTION 4

# Op-Ed Campaigns & Letters to the Editors

## SECTION 4: OP-ED CAMPAIGNS & LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Op-Eds and Letters to the Editor offer something press releases cannot: your voice directly in the publication, unfiltered by reporter interpretation.

**The Strategic Value:** Op-eds position your quitline director, health official, or subject matter expert as an authority. Letters to the editor amplify grassroots voices and demonstrate community support. Both appear in editorial sections where readers specifically seek perspective and opinion and presents a different audience mindset than news coverage.

### 4.1 Op-Eds (Opinion or Oppose Editorials)

Op-eds are 600-800 word persuasive pieces published in newspaper editorial sections. Unlike press releases that announce news, op-eds argue for a position or provide expert perspective. They state a clear opinion, often supported by facts on one side of the debate or discussion and/or rebut opposing points.

#### The Decision Framework

##### Pursue an op-ed when you have:

- A clear position on a timely issue
- An expert with credibility to author it
- Evidence to support your argument
- 3-4 weeks for drafting and approvals
- A publication willing to consider your piece

##### Don't pursue when:

- You're just announcing information (use a press release)
- You lack a clear argument or position
- The topic isn't currently in the news
- You can't clear approvals within the publication's timeframe

#### Essential Components

##### 1. Timely Hook (Opening 2-3 sentences)

Connect immediately to current news, recent data, or trending issue.

✗ Weak: "Tobacco use remains a serious public health problem in our state."

✓ Strong: "As lawmakers debate next year's Medicaid budget, they should know this: Every dollar spent on tobacco cessation saves six dollars in future healthcare costs."

##### 2. Clear Argument (Stated by paragraph 3)

Don't make readers guess what you think. **Formula:** "We urge [specific action] because [clear reason]"

##### 3. Supporting Evidence (Middle paragraphs)

Support your position with state-specific health data, peer-reviewed research, program outcomes, expert statements, and brief personal stories.

##### Credible evidence includes:

- State-specific health data (smoking rates, disease burden, healthcare costs)
- Peer-reviewed research (cite specific studies, not vague references to "research shows")
- Program outcomes (quit rates, services utilization, cost-effectiveness)
- Expert statements (Surgeon General, CDC, medical associations)
- Personal stories (brief examples illustrating your point)

##### 4. Anticipate Counterarguments (1-2 paragraphs)

Acknowledge the strongest argument against your position and explain why your position still stands.

Example: "Some argue that tobacco users should quit on their own without government assistance. But nicotine is as addictive as heroin—this is neuroscience, not opinion. Like other chronic conditions, addiction requires professional treatment for most people to recover successfully."

## 5. Clear Call to Action (Closing paragraph)

Tell readers specifically what you want them to do: contact legislators, support funding, use quitline services, talk to family members about quitting.

✗ Weak: "We must all work together to reduce tobacco use."

✓ Strong: "Call your state representative this week and urge support for Amendment 147. Then call 1-800-QUIT-NOW to help someone you love quit tobacco."

## Submission Process

1. **Research target publications:** Note word limits, submission emails, exclusivity requirements (these are often publicly listed and available on websites)
2. **Draft and approve internally:** Route through necessary channels; aim for final approval 3+ days before submission
3. **Submit:** Paste in email body AND attach as Word doc; include author bio and headshot
4. **Follow up:** If no response after 1 week, follow up once; if rejected, ask about different topics

**If Rejected:** Don't take it personally (rejection rates are 80-90%). Try other publications, repurpose as blog post, or try again with different topic.

## 4.2 Letters to the Editor

Letters to the editor (LTEs) are shorter than op-eds (150-300 words) and provide opportunities for community members – not just officials – to speak up on issues. For quitline programs, LTEs can demonstrate public support, share personal perspectives, and keep your issue visible in editorial pages.

### Purpose and Strategic Value

LTEs serve different purposes than op-eds:

- **Demonstrate grassroots support:** Letters from community members show your issue has broad backing
- **Respond to articles or other op-eds:** Counter misinformation or add perspective to recent coverage
- **Share personal stories:** Individual experiences carry emotional weight that official statements cannot
- **Maintain issue visibility:** When you can't get op-ed placement, letters keep your topic in public conversation
- **Easier approval process:** Letters from community members don't require government approval

### Who Should Write Letters:

- ✓ Former tobacco users who quit with quitline support
- ✓ Healthcare providers who refer patients to quitlines
- ✓ Community leaders concerned about tobacco use
- ✓ Parents concerned about youth vaping
- ✓ Faith leaders, teachers, coaches, business owners
- ✓ Anyone with personal stake in tobacco control

### Government employees can write letters, but:

- Use personal email addresses, not official government accounts
- State clearly you're writing as an individual, not representing your agency
- Get appropriate clearance if required by your agency policies
- Consider whether a community voice would be more powerful

## Writing Effective Letters to the Editor

1. Reference recent coverage (1 sentence)
2. State your perspective (2-3 sentences)
3. Provide evidence or example (2-3 sentences)
4. End with quitline information (1-2 sentences)

### Example:

*Your article about teen vaping captured a trend I'm seeing firsthand as a high school teacher. Three students approached me last month asking how to quit vaping; they started because "everyone does it" but now can't stop.*

*What these students need to know is that free help exists. The [State] Tobacco Quitline offers text-based support specifically designed for young people. Text QUIT to [number] or call 1-800-QUIT-NOW.*  
[Name], [City]

### Writing Guidelines:

#### Do:

- Keep it to 150-300 words (check publication's specific limit)
- Reference a recent article, op-ed, or issue in the news
- Make it personal and specific to your community
- Include quitline contact information
- Use your real name and city (publications often verify identity)
- Proofread carefully

#### Don't:

- Attack people personally (focus on issues, not individuals)
- Include multiple complex arguments (one clear point is enough)
- Use jargon or technical language
- Rehash points made in recent letters (editors want fresh perspectives)
- Submit the same letter to multiple publications (most require exclusivity)

### Angles That Work Well for Quitline Letters:

Angle	Example Opening
Personal success story	"Five years ago, I couldn't climb stairs without getting winded. Today, thanks to the state quitline, I'm tobacco-free and just ran my first 5K."
Healthcare provider perspective	"As a family physician, I refer patients to the tobacco quitline weekly. What surprises many: the service provides free medications delivered to their door."
Parent/family concern	"When my teenager started vaping, I felt helpless. The quitline's text-based youth program gave him confidential support I couldn't provide."

<b>Economic argument</b>	"Your editorial about healthcare costs missed a key point: Our state quitline costs \$3 million annually but saves \$18 million in prevented medical expenses."
<b>Local angle</b>	"The article about Main Street's new smoke-free ordinance didn't mention that free help exists for affected smokers. The quitline serves all residents at no cost."

## Submission Process

- Find submission information:** Check publication's website for "Submit a Letter" or "Contact Us - Opinion"
- Submit with required information:** Include the letter itself, your name, address and phone number, and title/affiliation if relevant (for verification, not all will be published)
- Follow up:** If no response after 1 week, follow up once; if rejected, ask about different topics

## Recruiting Community Members to Write Letters

For government communicators, organizing letter-writing campaigns multiplies your voice without requiring official government positions.

### Recruitment strategies:

- Partner organizations:** Ask coalition partners to encourage their members/supporters to write
- Success story participants:** People who've quit with quitline support often willingly share
- Healthcare providers:** Doctors and nurses who refer to quitlines can speak about effectiveness
- Events and meetings:** At community health events, invite participants to write letters on key issues

### Support you can provide:

- Sample letters (templates they can personalize—not copy verbatim)
- Key talking points and statistics
- Instructions on how to submit
- List of target publications

**Important:** Encourage authentic personal letters, not form letters. Editors quickly spot identical submissions and may reject all of them. Provide frameworks and facts, but each letter should be in the writer's own words with their own story.

## 4.3 Strategic Planning: Maximizing Impact

Random op-eds and letters generate less impact than strategically planned editorial campaigns. Effective planning ensures your pieces run when they will have maximum influence. The editorial calendar including milestones and observances that is discussed later and in the addendum is particularly helpful for you to plan.

### Identifying Opportunities

**Reactive (Respond to Current Events):** Monitor for recent coverage, new research, policy debates, data releases. Window: Submit within 3-5 days of news.

**Proactive (Plan Ahead):** Schedule around health observances (Great American Smokeout, World No Tobacco Day), budget/legislative cycles, and local concerns.

## 4.4 Amplifying Published Pieces

Getting published is only half the value. Strategic amplification extends reach.

### Immediate Actions (Within 2 hours):

- Share from official accounts
- Tag publication and journalist
- Include key quote as image
- Use relevant hashtags
- Include call to action with quitline resources
- Activate social media posts from official department accounts



North American Quitline Consortium  
@NAQC

Access to free cessation support shouldn't depend on where you live or your insurance status. Grateful to [@StateNewspaper](#) for publishing this op-ed on why quitline services matter. [\[link\]](#)  
[#TobaccoCessation](#) [#PublicHealth](#)



North American Quitline Consortium  
2h

Excited to share this op-ed in [Publication] about [topic]. Key point: (one compelling sentence from the piece).

Every year, [State's] quitline helps thousands of people quit tobacco. Services are free and confidential.

👉 Learn more: quitline website link

 Like  Comment  Share

### Extended Amplification (Days 2-7):

- Ask partner organizations to share
- Send to email distribution lists
- Repurpose content: pull quotes for standalone social posts, create infographics

### Partner Amplification:

Provide partners with direct link, 2-3 suggested social captions, quote graphics, and key hashtags.

## SECTION 5

# Media Amplification Tools & Tactics

## SECTION 5: MEDIA AMPLIFICATION TOOLS & TACTICS

Beyond press releases and pitches, specialized tools can expand your reach significantly. This section covers MAT releases, Satellite Media Tours (SMTs), and creative "buzzworthy" tactics, each serving distinct purposes whether you're launching campaigns, responding to issues, or maintaining visibility. These approaches help you reach multiple markets with professional-quality content.



### MAT RELEASES



### SMTs



### BUZZWORTHY IDEAS

#### 5.1 MAT Releases

MAT releases are pre-packaged, publication-ready articles that newspapers and digital outlets can insert directly with minimal editing. They're especially effective for community newspapers and smaller outlets with limited resources.

One of the key advantages of MAT releases is their customization flexibility. While the core messaging remains consistent across all placements, local outlets can add location-specific information - such as regional quitline numbers, local quit rates, or community success stories - making the content feel tailored to their readership while maintaining your primary messages. This format is best suited for community newspapers, smaller market outlets, and digital publications with limited resources for original content generation. These outlets often welcome quality, ready-to-publish health content that serves their readers' interests without taxing their limited editorial staff. They also often are effective at reaching target populations.

**Cost:** \$300-\$1,500 depending on reach and targeting.

##### When to Use:

WHEN TO USE MAT RELEASES	
	Health observances (Great American Smokeout, World No Tobacco Day)
	Major campaign launches
	New research/data releases
	Seasonal quit promotions (New Year's, back-to-school)
	Limited paid media budget
	Markets where relationships are still developing

##### Vendors:

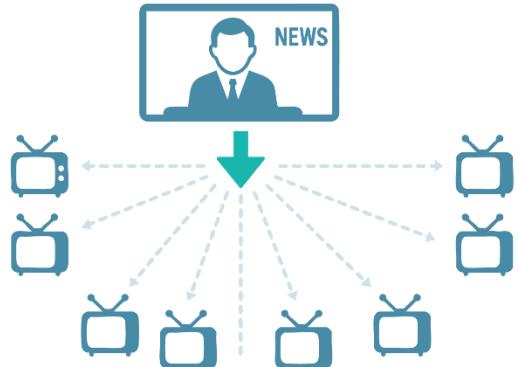
- PR Newswire
- North American Precis Syndicate (NAPS)

- State Press Association networks

## 5.2 Satellite Media Tours (SMTs)

Satellite Media Tours enable a spokesperson to conduct back-to-back broadcast interviews from one studio location, reaching multiple TV markets in a single day. SMTs eliminate travel while maximizing exposure for major announcements or compelling human interest stories. They're particularly valuable when you have a powerful spokesperson who can deliver emotionally resonant messages about tobacco's health impacts.

**Cost:** \$15,000-\$40,000 for professional SMTs; \$5,000-\$10,000 for radio-only tours.



### When to Use SMTs:

	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> There's a compelling visual spokesperson
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Major campaign launch
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Time-sensitive health alert
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New quitline data
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Celebrity/high profile spokesperson available
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Traditional media tour not feasible

### Vendors:

- MultiVu (PR Newswire's broadcast division),
- D S Simon Media
- CEG Worldwide
- Medical Broadcasting Company
- 4Media Group

## 5.3 Buzzworthy Media Ideas

Buzzworthy tactics are creative, visual, or unexpected approaches that transform standard messaging into stories journalists want to cover.

These tactics are scalable: some require minimal budget but significant creativity, while others need more resources but deliver outsized attention. This section covers proven approaches with practical execution guidance.

### Purpose and Background

Buzzworthy tactics are designed to create visual, experiential, or unexpected events that generate organic media coverage beyond what traditional press releases can achieve. They leverage the fundamental principle that "seeing is believing" tangible demonstrations of tobacco's impact are inherently more newsworthy than statistics alone. These approaches are specifically designed to break through media clutter with unexpected, photo-worthy and video-worthy moments that capture attention in both traditional media and social media feeds.

- **Installations & Artistic Displays:** Visual installations that transform abstract health statistics into concrete, photographable realities
- **Tobacco Memorials:** Events and displays honoring individuals lost to tobacco-related disease
- **Tobacco Toll Demonstrations:** Visual representations that make abstract death/disease numbers impossible to ignore
- **Rallies:** Organized gatherings that generate energy, visibility, and media coverage
- **Impact Demonstrations:** Displays showing tangible evidence of tobacco's proliferation and consequences
- **Cleanups:** Community cleanup events focusing on cigarette butts and tobacco waste
- **Youth Advocacy:** Creating opportunities for youth leadership and voice in tobacco control
- **Elected Official Partnerships:** Collaborations with legislators and government leaders
- **Community Organization Partnerships:** Strategic alliances with health, faith, veteran, education, and other organizations
- **Celebrities, Athletes & Influencers:** Partnerships with high-profile individuals
- **Creating Partnership Media Opportunities:** Strategic co-creation of newsworthy moments with partners
- **Personal & Authentic Stories (*Tips* Model):** Real people sharing tobacco-related health consequences and quit journeys
- **Tips Local Market Media Tour:** Coordinate media tour with people featured in the CDC *Tips* campaign to tell their story paired with a local expert to add tobacco control context
- **Campaign Recruitment:** Building pipeline of ready spokespeople and storytellers

Expanded guidance for each tactic is provided in the addendum section.

SECTION 6

# Leveraging Milestones & Observances

## SECTION 6: LEVERAGING MILESTONES & OBSERVANCES

Milestones and observances provide natural opportunities to elevate tobacco control messaging, generate media coverage, and drive engagement with cessation services. From established national events like the Great American Smokeout to state-specific recognition weeks, these moments offer built-in news hooks that resonate with audiences and journalists alike. A strategic approach to leveraging these opportunities through thoughtful editorial calendar planning and, when appropriate, creating observances unique to your program, can help sustain year-round momentum, reach priority populations, and ensure tobacco control remains visible in public conversation.

### Watchouts

Some of these health observances draw significant attention from other organizations that can push tobacco out of the story. Others no longer generate significant news media attention. It's worthwhile thinking about the opportunity in advance and looking at coverage in recent years for a baseline. In many cases an organic social media approach may be more fitting. However, if an observance or milestone becomes important for any reason, yet doesn't seem to be newsworthy, you can add PR elements to your plan or combining a "buzzworthy" idea in conjunction to make it more attention grabbing or notable.

### 6.1 Key Tobacco Observances

Month	Observance	Category
January	Anniversary: First Surgeon General's Report (Jan 11)	Milestone
March	Kick Butts Day (Mid-March)	Tobacco Control
May	World No Tobacco Day (May 31)	Tobacco Control
November	Great American Smokeout (Third Thursday)	Tobacco Control
November	Lung Cancer Awareness Month	Cancer
November	COPD Awareness Month	Respiratory

*For the complete list of tobacco and health observances, see Section 12 Addendum.*

### 6.2 Cultural Milestones & Observances

While tobacco-specific observances provide the foundation for earned media planning, expanding beyond traditional health moments allows programs to connect tobacco messaging to broader cultural conversations. By aligning tobacco control with events and observances that your target audiences already care about, such as back-to-school season and financial literacy month, you create more entry points for engagement and demonstrate tobacco's relevance across multiple aspects of daily life.

#### Family & Youth-Focused:

- Back to School (Late August/September) - youth prevention
- Red Ribbon Week - Last week of October (drug prevention, including tobacco/nicotine)
- Graduation Season (May/June) - healthy futures

#### Military & Veterans:

- Veterans Day (November 11) - high smoking rates among veterans

- Military Appreciation Month (May)

#### **Workplace & Community:**

- “Quit season” - Typically, GASO is the unofficial start in November and the season runs through January; focus on resolutions to quit
- Tax Day (April 15) - money saved by quitting
- Earth Day (April 22) - cigarette butt litter

#### **Specific Demographics:**

- Black History Month (February) - health disparities, menthol targeting
- Hispanic Heritage Month (September 15-October 15) - culturally tailored messaging
- Pride Month (June) - LGBTQ+ targeted marketing by tobacco industry

#### **CANADA-SPECIFIC:**

- National Non-Smoking Week (January, third full week)
- Weedless Wednesday (Wednesday of Non-Smoking Week)

### **6.3 Building Editorial Calendars**

An editorial calendar transforms a list of dates into an actionable communications roadmap, ensuring you maximize high-value opportunities while maintaining flexibility to respond to emerging news. A well-constructed calendar balances proactive planning with the flexibility to respond to breaking news, ensures your messaging reaches diverse audiences at the right moments, and prevents the common pitfall of reactive, last-minute communications. Most importantly, it transforms observances from isolated awareness moments into integrated campaigns that drive measurable action, whether that's quitline calls, media placements, or policy momentum.

**EDITORIAL CALENDAR PLANNING CHART**

PHASE	KEY ACTIONS	TIMELINE/LEAD TIME	OUTPUT/DELIVERABLE
<b>Foundation</b>	Plot all relevant health observances; add cultural moments and seasonal opportunities; include state/local-specific events; note fiscal year timing; mark existing program deadlines	3-4 months before calendar year begins	Master calendar framework with all potential opportunities mapped
<b>Audience Prioritization</b>	Identify target segments (current smokers, youth, pregnant women, priority populations, providers, policymakers); determine messaging priorities for each	2-3 months out	Audience segmentation matrix with key messages by segment
<b>Content Development</b>	Align themes with observances; identify testimonials/real people stories; plan mix of service promotion, prevention, policy, and health education; consider seasonal hooks	6-8 weeks before each major observance	Content theme document with story angles and messaging pillars
<b>Channel Strategy</b>	Determine tactics across earned, owned, paid, and partner channels; coordinate with partner organizations; identify spokespeople and subject matter experts	4-6 weeks out	Channel plan with tactic assignments and partner commitments
<b>Tactical Execution</b>	Draft content in advance; develop media lists by topic/beat; create content libraries (fact sheets, FAQs, images); coordinate amplification with partners	2-4 weeks before launch (longer for complex campaigns)	Tactical toolkit: media materials, social content, graphics, spokesperson briefings

Phase	Key Actions	Timeline/Lead Time	Output/Deliverable
Activation	Execute planned tactics; monitor engagement and media coverage; respond to real-time opportunities; adjust messaging as needed	During observance period	Active campaign with media outreach, social posting, partner coordination
Evaluation	Track metrics (media placements, reach, engagement, quitline calls, website traffic); assess performance; document lessons learned	Within 2 weeks after observance concludes	Performance report with recommendations for next cycle
Maintenance	Review calendar weekly/biweekly; add emerging opportunities; update status and outcomes; archive successful materials	Ongoing throughout year	Living document that evolves with your program needs

#### Critical Success Factors:

- **Identifying & Prioritizing Audience Segments:** You can't do everything for everyone. Focus first on audiences who drive your primary success metrics and priority populations where disparities are greatest.
- **Building in Realistic Lead Times and Maintaining Flexibility:** Major features need 3-4 weeks advance pitching. Op-eds need 2-3 weeks for review and placement. Leave 30-40% of your calendar open for responsive opportunities.
- **Manage the November Cluster:** With Great American Smokeout, Lung Cancer Awareness Month, COPD Month, and Thanksgiving competing for attention, create a thematic arc rather than treating each separately. Batch content creation in October.

*A complete sample editorial calendar (Q1-Q4) is available in Section 12 Addendum.*

## 6.4 Creating Your Own Unique Milestones

When existing observances don't address your state's unique tobacco landscape, creating a state-specific observance can build local ownership and distinguish your program.

#### Key Steps:

1. Define purpose and objectives (what gap does this fill?)
2. Determine timing (avoid conflicts; consider legislative sessions)
3. Develop naming and branding (clear, memorable, action-oriented)
4. Create official designation (Governor's proclamation adds legitimacy)
5. Build founding coalition (partners who commit to annual participation)
6. Develop core programming (signature events that can be replicated annually)
7. Launch, measure, and institutionalize

## Tobacco Free Florida Week

Tobacco Free Florida week is an annual observance by Florida's tobacco cessation and prevention program, Tobacco Free Florida. The week is dedicated to raising awareness about the dangers of tobacco and nicotine use while promoting tobacco free lifestyles across Florida.

Since its inception, the observance has incorporated annual themes that highlight key aspects of tobacco control relevant to each year, with past themes including "Mental Health = Mental Wealth" (a focus on overcoming the influences of tobacco on the mind), "The New Nicotine Generation" (awareness on the new and emerging tobacco products on the market), and "Team Up to Quit" (encouraging health care providers to have quit conversations with their patients).

The week typically features various communications aimed at educating Floridians about health risks associated with tobacco products, and providing accessible resources for quitting smoking. Tobacco Free Florida week represents a critical opportunity to engage media, stakeholders, and communities with meaningful conversations about tobacco-related issues while connecting Floridians directly to cessation services and prevention programs.

SECTION 7

# Social Media Integration

## SECTION 7: SOCIAL MEDIA INTEGRATION

News drives social media, and social media drives news traffic. Good or bad, many news outlets decide what is newsworthy based on how well that content performs on social and what “drives clicks.” The days of people perusing every article on a website, flipping through a newspaper or magazine and reading at least some of every story, or watching one of three news broadcasts are gone. This means even stories that run may have less reach. Understanding this relationship transforms how you engage journalists and extends your earned media reach. This section focuses on using social platforms to improve earned media outcomes by building reporter relationships, increasing story pickup, and amplifying coverage.

### **What This Section Covers:**

Building reporter relationships, amplifying coverage strategically, and knowing when to engage.

### **What This Section Doesn't Cover:**

General social media strategy, paid social advertising, community management, or building follower counts.

## 7.1 Building Reporter Relationships on Social Media

Social media provides low-stakes ways for public information officers and PR professionals to build familiarity with journalists before pitching stories.

### **Start with Following & Observing**

Follow reporters who cover public health, tobacco control, or related beats in your region. Add their handles to your media database. Note which platforms they use most actively. Take it slow.

### **Engage Thoughtfully:**

- Like posts about public health topics
- Share their stories through professional accounts when relevant
- Leave brief, substantive comments when you have expertise to add

### **Example appropriate engagement:**

Reporter posts about rising teen vaping rates. Your comment: "Important research. We're seeing similar trends in [State] and have expanded our text-based support specifically for young people. Happy to provide local data if useful."

### **What to Avoid (as government employee):**

- Never engage with partisan political content
- Avoid reporters' personal posts unrelated to their beat
- Don't weigh in on controversial policy debates outside your expertise
- When in doubt, don't engage

### **Platform Strategy**

If time is limited, focus on X (formerly Twitter) where most journalists remain active for breaking news, and secondarily LinkedIn for more formal connections.

### **Using Direct Messages**

Once you've established some presence, DMs can cut through overflowing email inboxes.

Saw your coverage of illegal vapes last month. We're launching a youth vaping campaign next week with new [State] data. Early access available if interested. Quick call Tuesday?"

MESSAGE

SEND

Follow up once if you don't hear back, but respect silence.

## SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT: SAFE VS. RISKY FOR GOVERNMENT



### SAFE ENGAGEMENT

- Like posts about health topics
- Comment on public health reporting
- Share their health/tobacco stories
- Thank them for accurate coverage
- Add relevant data professionally
- Tag in major announcements



### AVOID

- Like posts about political candidates
- Comment on opinion pieces about policy
- Share their stories about partisan issues
- Criticize coverage you dislike
- Jump into comment debates
- Tag in routine updates

When in doubt, err on caution. Your credibility is your most valuable asset.

## 7.2 Amplifying Coverage You've Earned

When done well, coverage shared on social platforms can reach exponentially more people than the original article alone. In some cases, a journalist's social followers exceed the number of people that "subscribe" to the publication or watch or listen to the channel they are on.

### Make Content Shareable

For every story, prepare: key statistics formatted as social graphics, pull quotes designed for sharing, high-resolution photos, and short video clips (15-30 seconds, captioned) for broadcast stories.

Organize in a shared folder and offer proactively when reporters agree to cover your story.

## MAKE EVERY STORY SOCIAL-MEDIA READY



**Key statistics as graphics** (square format, mobile-readable)



**Spokesperson pull quotes** (designed, not just text)



**High-res photos** (1200x630 minimum)



**Program logo** (PNG, multiple sizes)



**Video clips if available** (15-30 sec, captioned)



**Organized in shared folder** (easy download)



**Offered proactively when story confirmed**

Prepare BEFORE coverage runs. Make sharing effortless.

### Asking Journalists to Share

After publication: "The story turned out great. Thank you! Are you planning to share on your channels? We're ready to help amplify."

### Your Own Amplification

Whether or not the journalist shares, activate your own channels strategically. Within an hour of publication, share from your program and/or quitline accounts with a brief summary, thank the reporter and outlet by tagging them, include key takeaways, and add your CTA and contact information. Alert your stakeholder networks and make it easy for them to share by providing suggested language.

Within an hour of publication:

- Share from program accounts with brief summary
- Tag reporter and outlet
- Include key takeaways and CTA
- Alert stakeholder networks

When journalist shares:

- Like the post within minutes
- Leave substantive comment that adds value
- Share from your account crediting reporter and outlet

**Comment that adds value:** Not just "Great story!" but "We're already seeing increased calls from young people after this coverage. Free help is available 24/7 at 1-800-QUIT-NOW."

## 7.3 Strategic Tagging: When and How

When posting news to your channels, add key reporters to the post. However, be discerning as every tag essentially says: "This rises to the level of news value for your beat." That judgment must be sound.

### Tag selectively for:

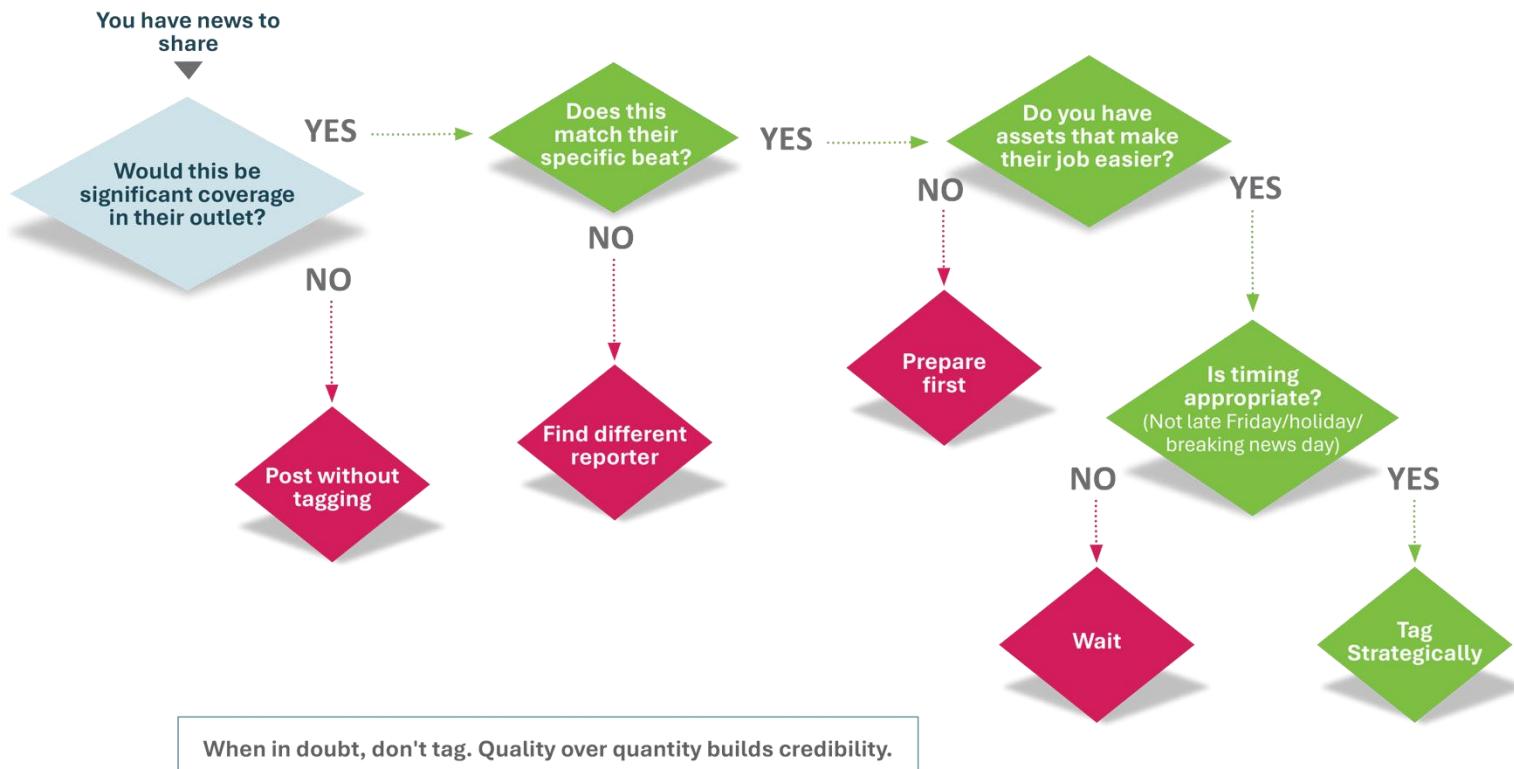
- Major data releases with significant findings
- Substantial program launches
- Urgent public health alerts
- Compelling human interest stories with broader relevance

### Never tag for:

- Template press releases announcing routine operations
- Minor personnel changes
- Self-congratulatory milestones
- Generic health tips

**The test:** Before tagging, ask: "Would I feel comfortable calling this reporter and pitching this?" If no, don't tag.

### SHOULD YOU TAG THIS JOURNALIST?



### Best Practices:

- Tag at most 2-3 journalists per post
- Tag during business hours (mid-morning Tuesday-Thursday works best)
- Be specific about why you're tagging

## BONUS: Reactive Media on Social Platforms

*This section addresses advanced techniques for after you've mastered the foundational practices above. If you're new to social media engagement with journalists, focus on Sections 7.1-7.3 first.*

### Your Role as First Line of Accurate Information

When tobacco-related stories break like high-profile deaths, surprising research, FDA announcements, and local incidents, social media explodes with conversation before traditional news fully reports. Misinformation spreads rapidly. As the government health authority on tobacco control in your state, you're uniquely positioned to provide accurate, credible information quickly.

This isn't just about earning coverage. It's about your public health responsibility to ensure accurate information reaches people when they're actively seeking it.

### Why Speed Matters

Journalists covering breaking stories need quick expert reaction, local context and data, and credible spokespeople available immediately. You can provide all of this if you're prepared and can move quickly. Organizations that respond within 2-4 hours are more likely to get quoted.

**Reactive triggers to watch for:** High-profile tobacco-related deaths or crises, FDA announcements, neighboring states passing major legislation, major studies in medical journals, youth tobacco survey releases, tobacco industry product launches, or vaping-related injuries in your state.

### Preparation: The 80% That Happens Before News Breaks

Reactive success depends on preparation. When breaking news hits, you won't have time to figure out processes.

Create template standby statements (100-250 words) for common scenarios. Include current facts about tobacco use in your state, your quitline services, quote-ready language from your program director, and media contact information. When news breaks, fill in the specific event details and post as soon as possible (ideally within an hour).

Identify and brief spokespeople in advance across different expertise areas: clinical, policy, operations, and partner organizations. Media train them before you need them and develop message maps they can reference.

Set up monitoring systems using Google Alerts for key terms, a team group chat where anyone can flag breaking stories, and if budget allows, paid tools like Talkwalker or Sprout Social that track keywords across social platforms in real-time. Utilize services like Critical Mention or TVEyes to track broadcast for breaking news.

Most critically for government entities: establish clear decision authority in advance. When minutes matter, determine who decides whether to respond, what approval level is required, who can authorize interviews, and after-hours contact protocols. Get as much standard language pre-approved as possible.

### The Reactive Response Workflow

- **0-30 minutes: Assess** - Team member flags the story. Does this have significant local relevance? Identify the right spokesperson.
- **30 minutes-2 hours: Prepare** - Customize your standby statement with specific details. Brief your spokesperson. Gather relevant local data. Draft a social media post (50-75 words).
- **2-4 hours: Activate** - Post to your channels with accurate information and expert perspective. Tag journalists covering the story: "Our [title] available for interviews on local impact." Proactively reach out offering your expert. Coordinate with partners to amplify.

## Breaking news: National study shows vaping injuries increasing

New national study on vaping injuries released today. In [State], we've seen [X] cases this year. Our quitline offers free support—call 1-800-QUIT-NOW or text QUIT to 47848. Dr. [Name] available for interviews on local impact. [Link]"

Tag 2-3 health reporters you know are covering this.

### When NOT to Respond

Not every breaking story requires your response. Don't respond when: the story has no local connection, you don't have accurate information yet, it's outside your expertise, the story is still developing rapidly with facts changing hourly, your approval process can't move within 2-3 hours, or the political environment is too sensitive and requires leadership consultation first.

### Building Reactive Confidence

Start small with lower-stakes situations. Track your outcomes: did your response generate interviews, provide public value, or receive positive feedback? Refine your systems based on real use. After 5-10 reactive responses, you'll develop better instincts, faster processes, and more confidence. Continue to refine your approach and invest for the long haul. Media has to get used to you being a source and it takes time.

Remember: Reactive media is advanced. Master the foundational practices first. When you're ready, reactive response capabilities position you as the authoritative voice journalists turn to first which ultimately serves your mission of connecting people who need help with the resources that can save their lives.

### The Integration Mindset

Social media integration for earned media isn't about becoming an influencer or building massive follower counts. It's about strategically using social platforms to build genuine relationships with journalists between pitches, amplify coverage you've earned through coordinated engagement, stay visible as a credible source, and provide accurate information quickly when breaking stories emerge.

The government communicators who excel don't necessarily have the biggest followings or most sophisticated strategies. They have consistent presence that keeps them visible to key journalists, sound judgment about when to engage and when to hold back, reliable systems that allow appropriate responses when opportunities arise, and respect for boundaries, both their own institutional constraints and journalists' professional needs.

Start small: Follow 5 key reporters this month. Add a handful each month after. Engage authentically with their work. Build from there. Each strengthened relationship improves your earned media outcomes over time and ultimately helps you reach more people who need the lifesaving support your program and your quitline provides.

## SECTION 8

# Crafting a Newsworthy Story

## SECTION 8: CRAFTING A NEWSWORTHY STORY

Understanding what makes a story newsworthy is fundamental to earning consistent coverage. The difference between a pitch that gets ignored and one that results in coverage often comes down to how effectively you've identified and articulated core news values. The goal isn't to manufacture news where none exists, but rather to recognize the inherently newsworthy elements within your quitline's work and present them in ways that align with journalistic standards and audience interests.

### 8.1 Elements of Compelling Media Stories

Journalists evaluate stories through several lenses, asking: "Why now? Why here? Why does this matter?"

#### Timeliness

Timing is the most critical factor. Pitch Tuesday through Thursday, before 10 AM. Align with editorial calendars planning health coverage months in advance.

##### Timeliness hooks include:

- **Health Observances:** World No Tobacco Day, Great American Smokeout create natural news hooks. See Section 6 for comprehensive observance guidance.
- **Seasonal Moments:** New Year's resolutions, back-to-school, holiday stress
- **New Data:** Annual smoking prevalence reports, youth tobacco surveys, quitline utilization statistics
- **Reactive News:** New research, policy changes, FDA announcements, tobacco industry developments
- **Evergreen + Hook:** Transform evergreen content by adding timely hooks: "As vaping among teens reaches new highs, quitlines see surge in concerned parent calls"

#### Proximity

Stories with clear local relevance consistently outperform those with only national significance.

- **Localize national trends** with state or community-specific data
- **Feature local people** with authentic testimonials
- **Connect to existing community concerns** already on local media's radar
- **Emphasize local economic impact** through healthcare costs saved, Medicaid savings, ROI

#### Impact

Stories affecting many people or affecting people significantly naturally attract attention.

- **Quantify:** Annual tobacco-related deaths, disease burden, youth use rates
- **Show outcomes:** Quit rates, people helped, lives saved
- **Economic impact:** Healthcare costs, lost productivity, Medicaid savings
- **Emotional impact:** Families affected, children impacted
- **Disparities:** Populations disproportionately affected and why it matters

#### Additional Factors

Beyond the core elements of timeliness, proximity, and impact, several additional factors can significantly boost a story's news value. Notable figures including celebrities, elected officials, medical experts, or community leaders lending their voices and credibility to your message elevate newsworthiness through their existing public profiles and media relationships. The scope of the problem or solution matters—stories about widespread issues or comprehensive solutions naturally attract more interest than narrow, limited stories. Significant milestones such as million<sup>th</sup> caller served, major funding increases, or program anniversaries create natural celebration moments that journalists recognize as newsworthy achievements.

## 8.2 Story Angles for Quitline Programs

### Personal Transformation Stories

Nothing captures attention like a well-told human story. Personal narratives transform abstract statistics into lived experience audiences can feel and relate to. When you connect a journalist with a former smoker willing to share their journey, you're offering something data alone cannot: the visceral reality of addiction, struggle, and transformation.

#### **Effective angles:**

- Health improvements (grandmother who can now play with grandchildren)
- Family-centered narratives (parent who quit so children wouldn't see smoking as normal)
- Financial transformation (calculating savings, redirecting toward family goals)
- Identity transformation (shift from "smoker" to tobacco-free)

Prioritize authenticity over perfection. Ensure storytellers reflect diversity of people served.

### Program Features and Success Stories

While personal transformation stories provide emotional hooks, program-focused angles build your institutional credibility. These stories demonstrate that your quitline isn't static but evolving to meet changing needs and leverage new technologies. They appeal to journalists covering health systems, public health infrastructure, and government accountability.

- **New service launches:** Text messaging, online chat, mobile apps
- **Expanded access:** Evening/weekend hours, multilingual services, specialized counseling
- **Success metrics:** Quit rates, call volumes, ROI
- **Integration stories:** Healthcare system referrals, employer programs
- **Quit coach profiles:** Day-in-the-life features humanizing your program

### Data and Research Angles

Numbers tell stories, but only when properly contextualized and interpreted. Data-driven stories appeal to journalists who value evidence-based reporting while providing authoritative hooks that editors find difficult to dismiss as merely promotional.

- **Annual reports as trend stories:** What's changing? Which populations succeeding?
- **Localizing national research:** How do findings align with your state's experience?
- **Emerging trends:** Rising vaping rates, demographic patterns, seasonal variations
- **Longitudinal data:** Six-month and one-year quit rates showing sustained success

### Policy and Advocacy Angles

Your quitline doesn't exist in isolation from broader tobacco control policy environments. Connecting your work to legislative developments and policy implementation creates stories that appeal to journalists covering government, public policy, and civic affairs.

- **Impact tracking:** How did smoke-free laws affect quit attempts? Did tobacco tax increases drive more people to seek cessation support? How are retailers complying with new tobacco licensing requirements?
- **Local policy adoptions:** Workplace, parks, apartment buildings going tobacco-free

## 8.3 Framing Narratives for Maximum Impact

The words you choose, the perspectives you emphasize, and the solutions you highlight don't just shape how journalists respond to your pitches, they fundamentally influence how the public understands tobacco use, addiction, and cessation. Framing is powerful precisely because it operates subtly, guiding audiences toward certain conclusions while making those conclusions feel natural rather than imposed. When done well, effective framing increases your likelihood of earning coverage while ensuring your messages advance rather than inadvertently undermine public health goals.

The challenge lies in balancing honesty about tobacco's severe health consequences with messaging that empowers rather than shames, that motivates action rather than triggering defensiveness or despair. Get the framing wrong, and even extensive media coverage can backfire, which can reinforce stigma, overwhelming audiences with fear and no solutions, or positioning quitting as so difficult that just attempting it feels pointless. Get it right, and your media placements become powerful catalysts for behavior change, normalizing help-seeking and building community support for cessation efforts.

### Core Principles

- **Lead with Possibility, Not Judgment:** Frame quitting as achievable with support. Avoid framing that positions quitting as impossible without superhuman willpower, or that suggests quitting should be easy with sufficient "willpower."
- **Normalize Multiple Attempts:** Most successful quitters required multiple attempts. Each attempt is a learning experience, not a failure.
- **Make Help Visible & Accessible:** Never discuss tobacco's harms without highlighting available support. Every interview should include quitline contact information.
- **Use Person-First Language:** "People who smoke" rather than "smokers"; smoking is a behavior, not an identity.
- **Focus on Solutions:** "Help is available and quitting is possible with support" proves more motivating than "you should quit."
- **Balance Urgency with Hope:** Acknowledge serious consequences while building confidence that change is possible.

### FRAMING GUIDE: BEST PRACTICES FOR TOBACCO CESSATION MESSAGING

PRINCIPLE	✓ DO THIS	✗ NOT THIS	WHY IT MATTERS
Frame Quitting as Achievable	"Quitting is challenging, but with evidence-based support like counseling and medications, success rates improve dramatically. Our quitline is here to help."	"Quitting smoking is one of the hardest things you'll ever do. Very few people succeed."	The first builds confidence and agency while being honest. The second discourages attempts and suggests success is unlikely.
Normalize Multiple Attempts	"Most people who successfully quit tried several times before succeeding. Each attempt teaches you what works and builds toward success."	"If you've tried and failed before, you probably don't have what it takes." or "You failed to quit again."	Removes shame, encourages persistence, positions attempts as learning experiences rather than failures.
Always Include Resources	"Smoking causes serious health problems, including heart disease and cancer. The good news: our	"Smoking will kill you. You need to stop." [No resources provided]	Awareness without action steps creates anxiety

PRINCIPLE	✓ DO THIS	✗ NOT THIS	WHY IT MATTERS
	quitline offers free coaching and medications to help you quit. Call 1-800-QUIT-NOW."		without solutions. Always pair harms with help.
Use Person-First Language	"People who smoke" or "People trying to quit"	"Smokers" or "Failed quitters"	Person-first language recognizes smoking as a behavior, not an identity. Identities feel fixed; behaviors can change.
Avoid Moralistic Judgment	"Tobacco is highly addictive. Quitting is difficult because of how nicotine affects the brain. Support can help."	"If you really wanted to quit, you would." or "Quitting is just a matter of willpower."	Addiction is physiological, not a moral failing. Judgment increases stigma and reduces help-seeking.
Focus on Help Availability	"Free support is available right now. Our trained coaches can help you create a quit plan that works for you."	"You should quit smoking." or "Don't you know smoking is bad for you?"	People who smoke already know it's harmful. They need information about support, not lectures. ~70% already want to quit.
Provide Clear Calls to Action	"Text QUIT to 47848 for 24/7 support" or "Visit QuitNow.com to get started" or "Call 1-800-QUIT-NOW to speak with a coach today"	"Resources are available if you want help." [vague, no specifics]	Concrete, specific next steps convert awareness into action. Vague references to "help" don't drive behavior.
Balance Urgency with Hope	"Smoking increases cancer risk, but quitting at any age reduces your risk. Within weeks of quitting, your heart disease risk begins to drop. We can help you get there."	"Smoking causes cancer. You're probably going to die from it." [No mention of quitting benefits or support]	Fear without solutions triggers defensiveness or hopelessness. Always pair consequences with hope and actionable support.
Emphasize Quitting Reduces Risk	"It's never too late to benefit from quitting. Your body begins healing almost immediately, and long-term risks continue dropping the longer you stay quit."	"The damage is already done. Quitting now won't help much."	This empowers long-term smokers who may think it's too late. Emphasizes immediate and long-term benefits.
Respect Privacy & Dignity	"Making the decision to quit is deeply personal. We're here to support you when you're ready, without judgment."	"Why haven't you quit yet? What's wrong with you?"	Respecting individual readiness and autonomy builds trust. Shame-based messaging drives people away from support.
Acknowledge Addiction	"Nicotine is as addictive as heroin or cocaine. Addiction is a medical condition, not a choice or weakness."	"Just stop buying cigarettes." or "It's not that hard—just quit."	Validates struggle, reduces shame, positions cessation as medical treatment rather than moral test.
Show Diverse Success Stories	Feature quit success stories across age, race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, geography	Only feature one type of person (e.g., young, white, affluent)	Everyone needs to see themselves reflected in

PRINCIPLE	✓ DO THIS	✗ NOT THIS	WHY IT MATTERS
			success stories to believe quitting is possible for them.
<b>Include Economic Accessibility</b>	"All services are completely free, including coaching, medications, and ongoing support. No insurance required."	"Our program costs X dollars per month" or no mention of cost/accessibility	Financial barriers prevent many quit attempts. Emphasizing "free" removes a major obstacle.
<b>Offer Multiple Entry Points</b>	"Call, text, chat online, or download our app—whatever works best for you. We meet you where you are."	"You must call us during business hours to get help."	Different people prefer different communication methods. Flexibility increases access.

## 8.4 Tailoring Stories for Different Media

One of the most common mistakes in media relations is treating all journalists and media formats the same. A pitch perfectly crafted for a newspaper feature editor will likely fail with a television producer, not because the story isn't newsworthy, but because the format requirements differ fundamentally. Print journalists need detailed information, multiple sources, and high-resolution images. Broadcast producers need strong visuals, concise soundbites, and compelling footage. Digital platforms blend elements of both while adding their own unique considerations around interactivity and shareability.

Understanding these format-specific requirements allows you to tailor your pitches, interviews, and materials to align with what each type of journalist actually needs to produce their story. When you provide a television producer with ready-access B-roll footage and a spokesperson trained to deliver punchy soundbites, you're removing barriers to coverage. When you offer a print reporter multiple expert sources and comprehensive data, you give them the building blocks for in-depth storytelling. This section breaks down the distinct needs, constraints, and opportunities of different media formats so you can adapt your approach strategically rather than using a one-size-fits-all strategy that fits no one particularly well.

### Print Media (Newspapers, Magazines, Online)

Print journalism, whether published on actual newsprint or digital platforms, offers unique advantages for in-depth storytelling. These formats can accommodate complexity, nuance, and detail in ways that broadcast's time constraints don't allow. A newspaper feature can explore multiple dimensions of tobacco cessation, include extensive data and expert analysis, and provide readers space to absorb information at their own pace. Online publications add the dimension of hyperlinks, allowing readers to dive deeper into supporting materials, related stories, or original data sources.

When working with print journalists, embrace the format's capacity for depth. Don't oversimplify or reduce your story to soundbite-length statements. Print reporters value comprehensive information that helps them build thorough, authoritative stories. They can include detailed statistics, present data visualizations, incorporate multiple expert perspectives, and explore policy implications with more sophistication than broadcast formats typically allow.

Comprehensive data presentation works particularly well in print. Charts showing quit rate trends over time, infographics illustrating tobacco's economic impact, tables comparing different cessation methods' effectiveness—these visual data elements enhance print stories by making complex information accessible and

visually engaging. Provide print journalists with these materials in high-resolution, publication-ready formats that their design teams can easily incorporate.

Multiple perspectives and varied voices strengthen print stories' credibility and depth. Unlike broadcast stories that typically feature one or two brief interviews, print articles can weave together quotes from former smokers, quitline counselors, public health officials, healthcare providers, and policy experts. Each voice adds a dimension that builds toward comprehensive storytelling. When pitching print stories, consider which sources beyond yourself could provide valuable perspectives, and offer to facilitate those connections.

Print's permanence and detail make it ideal for stories requiring careful explanation: policy analysis, research findings, program evaluations, and complex issues like health disparities or tobacco industry targeting. These stories benefit from print's ability to provide context, explore causation, and examine implications thoroughly.

*For the complete Print Media Checklist, see Section 12 Addendum.*

## Broadcast Media (Television and Radio)

Broadcast journalism operates under fundamentally different constraints than print. Time limitations dominate everything: television news packages typically run 90 seconds to 3 minutes, and within that brief window, your spokesperson might appear for just 10-15 seconds total. Radio stories face similar time constraints, though longer interview formats like morning shows or news magazines may provide more breathing room. These severe time limitations require radical simplification and message discipline that feels unnatural to people accustomed to explaining complex public health issues thoroughly.

B-roll footage becomes essential for television coverage. Footage of your quitline call center with counselors taking calls (with appropriate privacy protections), people engaging in healthy activities after quitting, healthcare settings where cessation counseling occurs, or visual representations of tobacco's impact all provide producers with the raw material they need to construct visually engaging stories. Facilitate B-roll opportunities by inviting camera crews to your facilities with advance notice that allows them to plan shooting. Better yet, produce your own B-roll packages that television stations can use freely, removing even this barrier to coverage.

Visual storytelling opportunities extend beyond B-roll. Before-and-after photos showing health transformations, graphics illustrating quit rates or health improvements, and footage of community events or policy signings all provide visual variety that keeps audiences engaged. When pitching television stories, always think: "What will this look like on screen? What visuals can we provide?"

### *Radio's Audio Focus*

Radio lacks television's visual dimension but creates intimacy through voice and sound. Radio formats often allow slightly longer segments than television, and the medium's intimacy makes it particularly well-suited for personal storytelling. Former smokers sharing their experiences, counselors describing their work, or health officials explaining policy changes can all work beautifully on radio when sources speak naturally and engagingly.

Natural sound (e.g. ambient noise from call centers, emotional moments from quit celebrations, community event sounds) adds texture and authenticity to radio stories. Help radio journalists capture these audio elements by alerting them to opportunities and ensuring clear audio quality. Poor audio quality kills radio stories faster than almost anything else.

Radio requires spokespeople to paint verbal pictures, using descriptive language that helps audiences visualize what they're hearing about. Without visual aids, explanations must be crystal clear and self-contained. Practice describing complex concepts simply and vividly, using metaphors or comparisons that create mental images.

## *The Soundbite Challenge*

Both television and radio require mastering the soundbite: a complete, quotable thought delivered in 7-12 seconds. This extreme brevity feels nearly impossible when you're trying to explain complex health issues, but it's non-negotiable for broadcast coverage. Soundbites must convey complete thoughts, not fragments. They should be conversational, not jargon filled. They need to be memorable, not generic.

Effective soundbites often use:

- **Concrete examples:** "One of our callers told me she can finally play with her grandchildren without getting winded, that's why I do this work."
- **Vivid comparisons:** "Nicotine is as addictive as heroin, but unlike heroin, it's sold legally on every corner."
- **Clear action steps:** "Call 1-800-QUIT-NOW to speak with a trained coach within minutes, and it's completely free."
- **Personal conviction:** "I've watched thousands of people quit successfully. It's possible, and we're here to help."

*For complete Television and Radio Checklists, see Section 12 Addendum.*

## Longer-Form Content (Features, Documentaries)

Longer-form journalism represents the deep end of media coverage, comprehensive storytelling that unfolds over weeks or months of reporting, involves extensive source interviews and research, and produces substantial pieces that explore issues with unusual depth and nuance. Feature articles in major magazines, investigative series in newspapers, documentary films, and long-form podcasts all fall into this category.

These projects require different expectations and engagement strategies than daily news coverage. Journalists working on longer-form pieces often invest months developing their stories, conducting numerous interviews, reviewing extensive documentation, and crafting narrative structures that build over time. Your role shifts from providing quick information for immediate stories to serving as a long-term resource and facilitator who helps journalists access what they need throughout extended reporting periods.

### *Narrative Structure Matters*

Longer-form journalism typically follows narrative structures more common to literature than to news reporting. Instead of the inverted pyramid (most important information first) that structures daily news, longer pieces often use chronological storytelling, character development over time, conflict and resolution frameworks, or thematic organization that explores topics from multiple angles before synthesizing insights.

Understanding these narrative needs helps you identify which elements of your work might anchor compelling longer-form stories. Character-driven narratives might follow a former smoker through their entire quit journey over six months, documenting setbacks and breakthroughs. Investigative pieces might trace policy development from grassroots advocacy through legislative passage to real-world implementation. Documentary films might explore tobacco's impact on a particular community through multiple residents interconnected stories.

When pitching or supporting longer-form projects, think about narrative arcs rather than just information. Who are the compelling characters whose journeys could anchor stories? What conflicts or tensions exist that create narrative momentum? What transformations occur over time that provide satisfying resolution? How do individual stories connect to broader systemic issues?

### *Multiple Perspectives Build Depth*

Longer-form journalism thrives on multiple perspectives that build complexity and authenticity. A magazine feature about tobacco cessation might include interviews with former smokers, quitline counselors, tobacco

researchers, public health officials, healthcare providers treating tobacco-related illness, family members of people who died from smoking, tobacco company representatives, and policy advocates. Each perspective adds dimension that helps readers understand the issue's full complexity.

Be prepared to facilitate access to diverse sources beyond your organization. Journalists appreciate sources who help them find other relevant voices rather than trying to monopolize the story. Suggest people with different experiences, expertise, or viewpoints who could contribute valuable perspectives. This generosity often results in better stories while positioning your organization as helpful and credible rather than controlling.

### *Time Investment and Patience Required*

Longer-form projects unfold on timelines that feel glacial compared to daily news. Initial conversations might occur months before interviews begin. Interviews and reporting might stretch across weeks or months. After reporting concludes, writing, editing, and production can take additional months. Publication or broadcast dates may shift repeatedly as stories develop.

Maintain regular communication throughout these extended timelines without being pushy. Check in periodically to see if journalists need additional information or access. Be responsive when requests come in, even if months have passed since your last conversation. Understand that publication timelines are often beyond journalists' control, particularly for freelancers pitching to publications or documentary filmmakers seeking funding and distribution.

### *Depth of Information Required*

Longer-form journalists often request extensive background information, supporting documentation, and contextual materials that go far beyond what daily news reporters need. Be prepared to provide detailed program reports, comprehensive data sets, policy documents, historical context, and connections to broader research and literature. These journalists are building authoritative pieces that will face scrutiny, so they need to thoroughly understand and verify every element.

Longer-form coverage often delivers disproportionate impact despite longer development timelines. A substantial magazine feature or documentary reaches audiences who might never engage with daily news coverage. These pieces often get shared widely, referenced by other journalists, and continue generating awareness long after publication. The time investment required to support longer-form journalism can deliver significant returns in elevated organizational profile, comprehensive public education, and sustained media attention.

*For the complete Longer-Form Media Checklist, see Section 12 Addendum.*

## 8.5 Pitch Templates and Examples

Effective pitches follow recognizable patterns that journalists expect while incorporating the specific news values and story elements discussed throughout this section. While every pitch should be customized to the specific story, outlet, and journalist, these templates provide frameworks you can adapt for common quitline story types.

*Complete pitch templates for Personal Story, Research/Data, Program Launch, Health Observance, Reactive/Newsjacking, Visual/Event, and Exclusive/Embargo angles are available in Section 12 Addendum.*

Tailoring your approach to different media formats isn't about changing your core messages, it's about packaging and delivering those messages in ways that align with how different journalists work and what their audiences expect. Print's depth, broadcast's brevity, and longer-form journalism's narrative complexity each offer unique opportunities to reach audiences and advance your mission. The most successful media relations strategies leverage all three formats strategically rather than defaulting to a single approach.

As you develop relationships with journalists across different media types, you'll increasingly understand individual reporters' specific needs and preferences. Some television reporters love receiving pre-produced B-roll packages. Others prefer shooting their own footage. Some print journalists want extensive background materials upfront, while others prefer brief pitches followed by deeper materials only if they're interested. Pay attention to these individual preferences and adapt accordingly.

Track which media formats generate the strongest response for different types of stories. Personal transformation stories might perform exceptionally well on morning television shows but struggle to get traction in business-focused newspapers. Data releases might drive strong print coverage but receive less broadcast attention unless paired with compelling personal stories. Policy developments might anchor longer-form investigative pieces but get minimal daily news coverage. Understanding these patterns helps you pitch the right stories to the right formats, increasing your success rate while respecting journalists' time.

Most importantly, remember that format requirements aren't obstacles but rather creative constraints that can strengthen your storytelling. The discipline of condensing complex messages into 10-second soundbites forces clarity that benefits all your communications. The visual thinking required for television pitches helps you recognize compelling imagery that enhances print stories too. The narrative arc development needed for longer-form journalism deepens your understanding of your program's impact and evolution. Embracing each format's unique demands makes you a more versatile, effective communicator across all channels.

## SECTION 9

# Media Training

## SECTION 9: MEDIA TRAINING

Your position as a quitline director, tobacco control coordinator, or public health official already establishes credibility with journalists. Reporters seek you out because your expertise can help their audiences understand important health issues and access life-saving resources. Media training helps you translate expertise into interviews that connect with people who need help and every well-delivered message about your quitline has the potential to reach someone ready to quit, potentially saving their life.

Media training transforms subject matter experts into confident communicators who can navigate interviews naturally while ensuring their most important messages break through. It helps you approach interviews with confidence rather than anxiety, knowing you have the skills to represent your organization and this important issue.

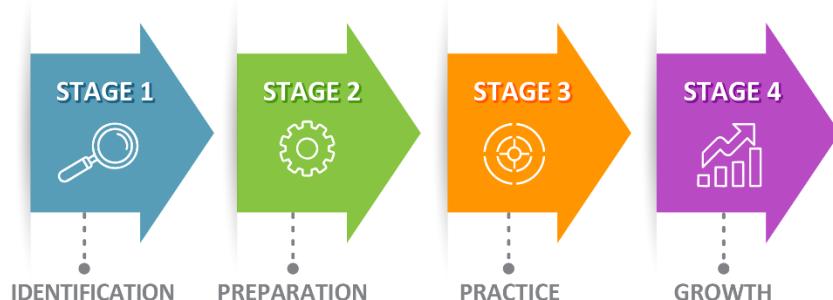
Leading organizations conduct media training *at least* annually for designated spokespeople, with refreshers before major campaigns. A comprehensive session typically runs a full day with four or fewer participants, combining instruction on core techniques, practice with your messages, and multiple rounds of simulated interviews where you can experiment and build skills in a supportive, no-stakes environment. Most interviews you conduct begin from a place of positive collaboration. Journalists are pressed for time, and their task is to deliver a story, most likely that they have been assigned. They are highly skilled at developing stories rapidly. Those stories often require people to bring it to life. You are filling a role as a respected, credible authority on a topic. It is in the reporters' interest for you to deliver a good interview that adds to their story. The techniques below help you control the interview but also improve the delivery and the content you provide. It makes their story better. You should also feel empowered to help shape the story based on your knowledge and experience.

### What Effective Training Includes

- Core interview techniques that help you stay on message
- Practice with your organization's actual message maps and real-world scenarios
- Format-specific preparation (print, broadcast, digital)
- Multiple recorded mock interviews with constructive feedback
- Video review that helps you see your strengths and build on them
- Strategies for handling sensitive or challenging questions

Your internal communications team may be able to lead training if they have journalism backgrounds or extensive media relations experience. However, many agencies benefit from external trainers who provide fresh perspectives and create psychological distance that helps participants receive feedback more openly.

Even the world's best spokespersons can benefit from opportunities to practice things like comfortably delivering key messages, anticipating the toughest questions and having answers ready, and identifying opportunities to make the most of every interview. Media training can and should be adjusted to benefit message representatives at any level!



## 9.1 Spokesperson Identification and Development

Many quitline programs already have designated spokespeople. If your organization does, this section helps you evaluate whether you need to expand your roster to include different expertise areas or provide backup capacity.

### Why Multiple Spokespeople Matter

Different spokespeople bring different strengths: clinical expertise, program operations knowledge, frontline experiences, or policy understanding. This allows you to match spokespeople to specific story angles and respond quickly without being constrained by one person's availability. Representation among your spokespeople also matters, especially in news media, and therefore reflecting the communities and populations you serve is an important goal to have. In addition to appeals from authority, people with human interest stories to tell – such as quitline counselors or even people who have successfully quit using tobacco cessation services should also be trained before being put forward for interviews on your behalf.

### Essential Spokesperson Characteristics

Effective spokespeople:

- Explain complex information in accessible language that connects with real people
- Demonstrate authentic passion for helping people quit tobacco
- Maintain composure and clarity even when caught off guard
- Listen carefully and respond to what's being asked
- Understand their strengths and know when to defer to others

The best spokespeople aren't necessarily the most senior or most credentialed, they're people who connect authentically with audiences and make tobacco cessation feel achievable.

### The Public Speaking Indicator

People comfortable presenting at conferences, testifying at hearings, or facilitating meetings typically possess transferable skills.

**Building Confidence:**

- **Knowledge foundation:** Current use rates, populations affected, services, success stories
- **Message familiarity:** Internalize message maps through repeated practice
- **Graduated experience:** Start with friendly reporters, build to more challenging situations
- **Ongoing support:** Regular refreshers, pre-interview briefings, post-interview debriefs

## 9.2 Message Mapping: Your Strategic Foundation

Message maps provide clarity about what messages to deliver. They serve as your spokesperson's safety net—when you lose your train of thought or face unexpected questions, your message map keeps you grounded.

### The Three-Message Structure

Research shows audiences remember about three main points. For quitlines:

1. **You Can Quit:** Quitting tobacco is challenging, but we see people succeed every single day with the right support.
2. **Triple Your Chance of Success:** We offer free, evidence-based help including coaching, medication, and ongoing support that triple your chances of success.
3. **Start Today:** Call, text, or chat 24/7 to speak with someone who understands what you're going through.

# Sample Quitline Message Map

**KM 1**

**You Can Quit**

*Quitting tobacco is challenging, but we see people succeed every single day with the right support*

**KM 2**

**Triple your  
Chance of Success:**

*We offer free, evidence-based help including coaching, medication, and ongoing support that triple your chances of success*

**KM 3**

**Start Today:**

*Call, text, or chat 24/7 to speak with someone who understands what you're going through and can help you create a plan that works for you*

## ***Proof Points***

- Statistics, Facts and Data Points
- Resources
- Program Details
- Inspiration
- Success Stories/Impact Stories

***"CONFIDENTIAL" + "Approved by:" + "Date:"***

## Supporting with Proof Points

Every message needs proof points: facts, statistics, program details, and success stories:

<b>Facts &amp; Statistics:</b>	"Our current smoking rate is 10.2%" "Last year, we helped 12,000 state residents make serious quit attempts, and thousands are still tobacco-free today."
<b>Program details:</b>	"When someone calls, they speak with a trained coach who helps identify triggers, develop coping strategies, and create a personalized plan. We send free nicotine replacement therapy to their door and stay in touch through texts during vulnerable moments."
<b>Success stories/Impact Stories:</b>	"One of our callers, a 30-year smoker, had tried quitting five times. With her quit coach's support and nicotine patches, she's been tobacco-free for two years and just watched her daughter graduate college." "Terrie Hall from CDC's Tips From Former Smokers campaign bravely told us her story in hopes that others would quit. What stood out to me about her story and we are seeing in our state is..."
<b>Inspiration:</b>	"There are more former smokers than current smokers. You can quit."
<b>Health improvements:</b>	"Within weeks of quitting, people breathe easier, food tastes better, and they have more energy. Within a year, heart attack risk drops by half."
<b>Return on investment:</b>	"For every dollar invested in the quitline, we save multiple dollars in future healthcare costs."

## Creating Messages That Connect

Language should sound like something you'd say to a friend:

✗ Bureaucratic: "The state tobacco cessation program provides evidence-based behavioral interventions in conjunction with FDA-approved pharmacotherapy..."

✓ Conversational: "We give people two powerful tools: medication that reduces cravings and coaching that builds skills. Together, they work incredibly well."

## Government Clearance Considerations

Message maps may require review through communications offices or leadership. Build sufficient time: submit drafts well in advance, route through necessary channels, incorporate feedback, get final approval, and distribute to spokespeople. Aim for a final message map at least three days before training or interviews so your spokespeople can practice. Once cleared, message maps become your foundational language you can use confidently.

## 9.3 Interview Techniques: Staying On Message

Every effective interview follows patterns you can learn. This section focuses on three essential techniques: **bridging**, **flagging**, and **hooking**. These aren't manipulative tricks—they're professional communication techniques ensuring your messages reach people who need them.

**A note about journalists' real goals:** Most interviews begin from positive collaboration. Journalists need people to bring stories to life. It's in their interest for you to deliver a good interview. Feel empowered to help shape the story

Media teams should go into interviews with the mindset that "This is our interview and the reporter is a conduit to the people we need to reach." This is NOT an interrogation. Rather, the people who see this story need this information and you are the best person/organization to provide that.

based on your knowledge and experience.

## Bridging: Your Most Valuable Skill

Bridging acknowledges a reporter's question while connecting to your key message.

**Formula:** Brief acknowledgment + Bridge phrase + Your key message

### Common bridge phrases:

- "What's most important to remember is..."
- "Here's what matters most..."
- "What people should know..."

## BRIDGING IN ACTION

### Challenging Question:

*"Isn't it true that most people who try to quit smoking fail?"*

### Effective Response:

**Acknowledge briefly** Quitting often does take multiple attempts—that's the reality of overcoming nicotine addiction.

**Bridge phrase** What's important for people to understand is...

**Key message** Each attempt teaches you more about what works and brings you closer to success. When people use evidence-based support our quitline counselors offer and medication together their chances of quitting successfully triple. That's why we want everyone to know that help is available.

*NOTICE HOW THIS ACKNOWLEDGES THE QUESTION HONESTLY WHILE SHIFTING FOCUS TO POSSIBILITY, EVIDENCE, AND ACTION.*

### Practice Makes Natural

Bridging feels awkward at first. With practice, it becomes natural and conversational. The key is genuinely acknowledging what's been asked before transitioning. Ignore the question entirely and you'll appear evasive; acknowledge sincerely then connect to your message and you'll come across as thoughtful and focused.

## Common Bridging Scenarios

*Limitations or challenges:* "It's true we face unique challenges including higher poverty rates and tobacco-growing history. **What I'm excited about is** the progress we are making, especially with populations that historically had the highest smoking rates. Our quit rates are actually above national averages."

*Speculative questions:* "I can't predict legislative decisions. That's up to elected officials. **What I can tell you is** how we're using current resources to maximum effect, and the real impact additional resources could have on saving lives."

*Topics outside expertise:* "Federal regulatory policy isn't my area, and I'd refer you to FDA for details. **What I can speak to is** what we're seeing on the ground and that is more young people calling for help quitting vaping, and how we've adapted our services to support them."

## Flagging: Highlighting Your Best Material

Flagging signals when you're about to say something particularly important.

### Flagging phrases:

- "The most important thing to understand is..."
- "Here's the bottom line..."
- "If people take away one thing..."

Flag 2-3 times per interview maximum.

### Here's what everyone needs to know:

*Quitting is possible, free help is available right now and using that help dramatically improves your chances. That's why we want every tobacco user in our state to have our quitline number: 1-800-QUIT-NOW.*

TV reporters often use flagged comments as soundbites. Print journalists note them as potential pull-quotes. Listeners perk up when they hear these phrases.

## Hooking: Shaping the Conversation

Hooking invites specific follow-up questions you want to answer.

*Instead of:* "Yes, we have effective programs."

*Try:* "Yes, we're seeing really strong results, particularly with a population many people might not expect including pregnant women, who have incredibly powerful motivation to protect their babies."

This hooks toward a compelling story angle you're prepared to discuss.

## Handling Challenging Questions

Preparation dramatically reduces anxiety. Brainstorm 15-20 tough questions with your team and develop responses.

### Common categories:

*Moving quitlines forward.*

- Value and impact: "How do you know your program works?"
- Comparisons: "Why are other states showing better results?"
- Access and equity: "Why aren't you reaching [specific population]?"
- Choice: "Shouldn't it be their choice?"

#### **Response strategies:**

- **Direct acknowledgment:** "You're right that we're still working to reach rural communities. That's exactly why we're expanding text-based support."
- **Reframe misconceptions:** "I think that reflects a common misunderstanding about addiction. Nicotine is as addictive as heroin. That's neuroscience, not opinion."
- **Redirect helpfully:** "That policy question would be better directed to [authority]. What I can tell you is how our quitline supports people regardless of policy debates."

**Turning Threats into Opportunities:** By anticipating difficult questions and planning response strategies, you can transform the question you most dread into one you hope they ask because you've prepared the perfect answer.

#### **Additional Techniques:**

- **Always answer "Anything to add?"** This is your opportunity to deliver your most important message.
- **Never say "No comment."** Explain why you can't answer and offer alternative help.
- **Avoid echoing negative language.** Instead of "We're not failing to reach young adults," say "We're actively expanding our reach to young adults."
- **Use the Rule of Three:** "Our quitline works because of three elements: personalized coaching, free medication, and 24/7 support."
- **Humanize statistics:** "480,000 Americans every year – that's equal to the population of [local city] every year."

#### **Adapting to Different Formats:**

Print	Television	Radio/Podcast
More flexibility for nuanced responses	Responses rarely exceed 15-20 seconds	Smile while speaking. It comes through
Can pause to think	Bridge extremely quickly	Vary pace, tone, energy
Still keep responses focused	Nonverbal communication matters	Enunciate clearly, especially phone numbers

## 9.4 Post-Interview Follow-Up: Building Lasting Relationships

The interview is just one moment in an ongoing relationship. Strategic follow-up transforms single interviews into relationship-building opportunities.

### Immediate Actions (Within 24 Hours)

**Send a Brief, Personal Thank You:** Quick email expressing genuine appreciation. Reference something specific from the interview.

*Example:* "Thanks for taking time to discuss our quitline's youth vaping support today. I appreciated your thoughtful questions about reaching young people. Please don't hesitate to reach out for future stories. I'm happy to do more interviews or provide helpful background."

**Provide Promised Information:** If you said, "I'll get you those statistics" or "Let me connect you with someone," follow through immediately, within hours, if possible, especially if they are on deadline, and certainly within 24 hours.

This might include: specific statistics, contact information for other sources, clarification on technical details, high-resolution photos or B-roll, links to reports or research.

**Clarify Misunderstandings Diplomatically:** If the reporter misunderstood something important, address it immediately but tactfully: "As I was reflecting on our conversation, I wanted to clarify one point. When I mentioned our 30% success rate, I was referring to people who remain tobacco-free six months after their quit date, not 30-day quit attempts."

## The Support Person's Role

When possible, have a communications support person accompany spokespeople. During the interview, they take notes, check camera framing, and capture photos. After, they debrief constructively and execute follow-up.

## Systematic Follow-Up

### YOUR POST-INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

*Within 24 hours:*

- Send personal thank-you email
- Provide promised information
- Share content if needed
- Clarify significant misunderstandings
- Connect reporter with other sources
- Debrief with spokesperson

*Within one week:*

- Update media database
- Set up monitoring for story publication
- Prepare social media amplification
- Brief quitline staff on potential call increase

*When story publishes:*

- Share on social media, tagging reporter and media outlet
- Send thank you for fair coverage
- Track impact on calls/website traffic
- Add to media coverage library
- Assess message pull-through (what messages made it into the story)

*Ongoing:*

- Maintain contact through periodic check-ins
- Share relevant story ideas proactively
- Connect reporters with sources on related topics
- Be responsive when they face tight deadlines

## Learning from Every Interview

After significant interviews, take 15 minutes to reflect:

- What worked well? Which messages got through clearly?
- What could improve? Where were there missed opportunities?
- What surprised you? Questions you didn't anticipate?
- What would you do differently?

Over multiple interviews, track patterns: Which messages consistently appear in coverage? Which get left behind? Which soundbites get quoted repeatedly? Which reporters cover stories well?

## The Relationship-Building Long Game

Media relations is relational, not transactional. Reporters remember spokespeople who respond quickly on deadline, provide accurate information they can trust, make their jobs easier, follow through on commitments, and treat them as professional partners.

These relationships yield reporters contacting you first when tobacco stories break, advance notice of stories in development, prominent quitline mentions in coverage, fair treatment even when addressing challenges, and opportunities to suggest story ideas.

**Maintain relationships between stories** by sharing relevant story ideas that might interest them (even when they don't directly promote your program), connecting reporters with other credible sources, acknowledging their excellent work, and being helpful when they face crunch time.

Strong media relationships become organizational assets, creating opportunities for years. When reporters know they can count on you for accurate information and responsive support, they become partners in your mission to connect people who use tobacco with the help they need to quit. This is a marathon and not a sprint. Over time, you'll see your investments pay off with more stories, better coverage, and increased attention. You'll even be able to shape stories about tobacco control in your communities. The opposite is also true. If you are not engaging the media, but suddenly show up and want attention for a story you think is very important, even if it is, it's much harder to get media attention.

SECTION 10

# Monitoring & Response

## SECTION 10: MONITORING & RESPONSE

You've executed your earned media campaign, secured coverage, and built relationships with reporters. Now comes the phase that transforms these one-time successes into sustained program effectiveness: systematic monitoring, intelligent response, and continuous improvement. This section examines how to track media coverage comprehensively, respond to opportunities and challenges strategically, and use monitoring intelligence to strengthen every future campaign.

### 10.1 Setting Up Media Monitoring Systems

Effective monitoring requires systems that capture coverage comprehensively, deliver information to appropriate people quickly, and support analysis that drives better decisions. Your monitoring infrastructure determines whether you're operating with complete intelligence or flying blind with partial information.

#### Building Your Monitoring Foundation

Start by defining what you need to track and why. Different monitoring tools serve different purposes and trying to track everything equally creates information overload without delivering actionable benchmarks. Your monitoring priorities should connect directly to your program goals and available resources.

#### Primary monitoring objectives typically include:

- Awareness of all coverage mentioning your quitline
- Understanding reach and impact of that coverage
- Tracking message accuracy and pull-through
- Identifying opportunities for amplification or correction
- Correlating coverage with quitline call volume
- Building intelligence about media relationships and coverage performance

#### Free and Low-Cost Monitoring Tools

Google Alerts provides the foundation for basic monitoring. Set up alerts for your quitline name, key spokesperson names, major campaign themes, relevant tobacco control terms in your state, competing programs or services, and common misspellings of key terms. Configure alerts to deliver results "as they happen" rather than daily digests to enable faster response.

However, Google Alerts has significant limitations. It primarily captures online news and blog content, often misses smaller regional news sites, provides no broadcast monitoring, delivers results with variable lag time (sometimes hours after publication), and lacks sentiment analysis or comprehensive metrics.

Social media platforms offer native monitoring capabilities.

- X (formerly Twitter), create lists of health reporters, tobacco control organizations, partner organizations, and key influencers.
- Facebook and Instagram business accounts provide basic insights about mentions and engagement, though comprehensive social monitoring typically requires paid tools.

- YouTube monitoring matters for video content. Subscribe to local news channels and search periodically for your quitline name, campaign themes, and related tobacco control content. Video coverage often reaches different audiences than text-based media and provides valuable B-roll and visual assets you can amplify.

MONITORING SPREADSHEET CHECKLIST			
Create a simple spreadsheet to log all coverage as you discover it.			
At minimum, track:			
			
Date published	Outlet name and type (print/broadcast/online)	Headline or story	Reporter name
			
Estimated reach (circulation/ viewers/unique visitors)	Whether coverage was proactive (you pitched it)	Whether coverage was reactive	Whether your quitline number appeared prominently
		Sentiment (positive/neutral/negative)	
Which key messages appeared			

This manual tracking seems tedious, but it serves essential functions. It ensures you don't lose track of coverage, creates historical records for annual reports and funding requests, enables correlation analysis between coverage and call volume, and helps identify patterns in what stories work where.

## Professional Media Monitoring Services

As your program matures and budget allows, professional monitoring services provide capabilities that free tools cannot match. Different services have different strengths, so understanding what each provides helps you select appropriately.

Broadcast monitoring services like Critical Mention, MuckRack, and National Aircheck capture television and radio coverage that Google Alerts misses entirely. These services monitor hundreds of stations continuously, provide actual video and audio clips you can review and share, track broadcast mentions in real-time or near real-time, and measure reach through station viewership data.

Print and digital monitoring platforms like Muck Rack, Cision, and Meltwater provide more comprehensive coverage than Google Alerts. They monitor thousands of news sources globally, track social media mentions and engagement, provide sentiment analysis and message tracking, offer detailed analytics and reporting dashboards, and maintain extensive media contact databases.

Social media monitoring tools like Sprout Social, Hootsuite, and Brandwatch specialize in tracking social conversations. They monitor mentions across multiple platforms simultaneously, identify trending topics and hashtags, analyze sentiment and engagement patterns, track influencer amplification, and provide competitive intelligence about similar organizations.

When evaluating paid monitoring services, consider coverage scope, geographic relevance, reporting capabilities, integration with existing systems, support and training, and cost structure. Most quitlines start with free tools and upgrade to paid services as programs mature and demonstrate value. There's no shame in beginning with Google Alerts and manual tracking. What matters is consistency - capturing coverage systematically with whatever tools you have, analyzing that intelligence, and using it to improve.

## Creating Distribution Systems

Raw monitoring data only becomes useful when it reaches appropriate people promptly. Design distribution systems that get the right information to the right people at the right time.

Create a coverage alert protocol for your team. When significant coverage appears, who needs to know immediately? Typically, this includes communications staff who can share coverage on social media, program leadership who can amplify coverage through their networks, call center staff who may see increased volume, and spokespeople who were quoted or featured.

Develop different alert levels based on coverage significance.

**TIER 1 ALERTS (MAJOR COVERAGE REQUIRING IMMEDIATE ACTION)**

**TIER 2 ALERTS (SIGNIFICANT COVERAGE WORTH SHARING BUT NOT REQUIRING IMMEDIATE ACTION)**

**TIER 3 ALERTS (COVERAGE WORTH LOGGING BUT NOT REQUIRING BROAD DISTRIBUTION)**

Set up automated daily or weekly summaries for broader audiences. Program leadership often benefits from regular coverage digests rather than individual alerts for every story.

Discovering that coverage occurred represents just the first step. Extracting meaningful intelligence from that coverage, understanding its impact, analyzing message performance, and identifying patterns that inform future strategy, separates programs that simply collect clips from those that continuously improve.

## Essential Metrics to Track

Beyond basic coverage logging, systematic tracking should capture both quantitative and qualitative dimensions that reveal campaign effectiveness.

Develop a standard template your team uses consistently to analyze significant coverage. This ensures systematic assessment rather than ad-hoc impressions. Save the comprehensive analysis for significant coverage: broadcast interviews, feature stories, op-eds, and front-page placements.

Quantitative Metrics for Tracking	Qualitative Metrics for Tracking
Total number of stories or mentions	Coverage substance and strategic value
Reach or impression	Message accuracy and pull-through
Advertising value equivalency	Prominence of quitline contact information
Social media engagement (if applicable)	Spokesperson performance
Website traffic correlating with coverage dates	Story framing and narrative
Quitline call volume correlating with coverage dates	Source diversity
	Accuracy of facts and statistics

## Correlating Coverage with Quitline Metrics

The ultimate question: does media coverage actually drive people to call your quitline?

Answering this requires systematic tracking of both coverage and call volume, then analyzing correlations.

- Work with your quitline data team to access daily call volume data.
- Plot this data over time, noting dates when significant coverage appeared.
- Look for patterns: do call volumes spike following major broadcast coverage?
- Document compelling correlation examples for stakeholder reports

## 10.3 Responding to Industry Counter-Messaging

Tobacco control exists in a contested information environment. The tobacco industry, vape manufacturers, and retailers actively work to frame tobacco use as personal choice rather than public health crisis, cast doubt on cessation effectiveness, and oppose policies that reduce tobacco use. Understanding how to respond to industry counter-messaging protects your credibility and ensures accurate information reaches people who need it.

### Understanding the Counter-Messaging Landscape

Industry counter-messaging takes many forms, from direct opposition to subtle information positioning that undermines public health messaging. Common industry messaging themes include personal freedom and choice, economic arguments, harm reduction positioning, questioning science, and attacking government overreach.

The tobacco industry has become more sophisticated in recent decades. Rather than direct advertising from tobacco companies, opposition often comes through seemingly independent organizations that don't immediately reveal industry connections.

### When to Respond (and When Not To)

Not every industry message warrants response. Responding to everything spreads your resources thin and can amplify messages you'd prefer stayed obscure. Strategic response focuses on messages meeting specific criteria.

Respond when industry messaging appears in mainstream media reaching large audiences, contains factual inaccuracies, directly contradicts your program's messaging, influences policy decisions, or creates confusion among your priority populations.

Don't respond when industry messages appear in niche outlets with minimal reach, represent opinion rather than factual claims, would require extensive explanation unlikely to fit media formats, risk amplifying obscure messages, or fall outside your organization's authority to address.

## Response Strategies and Tactics

When response is warranted, several approaches work:

- Direct correction through media outlets, letters to the editor, op-ed placement, social media correction (done carefully)
- Rapid response statements to media
- Proactive education that prevents the need for reactive response

When responding to industry messaging, maintain professional credibility. Lead with health impact rather than industry criticism. Cite credible sources consistently. Avoid personal attacks or inflammatory language.

Acknowledge complexity when appropriate. Focus on solutions, not just problems.

Effective response requires preparation before messages appear. Build capacity through pre-drafted response templates, designated response team with clear decision authority, relationships with journalists you can quickly reach, social media assets ready for fast deployment, and regular monitoring of tobacco industry activities.

Remember that response is one part of comprehensive earned media strategy, not the entire strategy. Balance reactive response with proactive messaging that advances your quitlines mission.

## 10.4 Crisis Communications Notice

Tobacco control programs occasionally face unexpected situations requiring immediate communications response like a crisis involving your program, services, or the broader tobacco control environment. While comprehensive crisis communications planning extends beyond this guide's scope, understanding fundamental principles helps you navigate unexpected challenges while protecting your quitlines reputation and maintaining public trust.

### What Constitutes a Crisis

Not every challenging situation qualifies as a crisis requiring emergency response protocols. True crises typically involve:

- Potential harm to people
- Significant threat to program reputation
- Intense media attention or public scrutiny
- Regulatory or legal implications
- Rapid development requiring immediate response
- Stakeholder concern demanding official communication

Not every negative news story or critical comment represents a crisis. Distinguish crisis-level situations from routine challenges that don't require emergency protocols.

Crisis communications requires a team with deep experience, a special skill set, and access to high level tools. We would recommend identifying a crisis communications team to work with in advance, especially one that

understands the government environment. It would also be a worthwhile investment to have an outside team develop a crisis response plan for you.

## SECTION 11

# Reference

## SECTION 11: REFERENCE

### 11.1 Relevant Best Practices

Health Communications in Tobacco Prevention and Control (2018)

<https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/76024>

Mass-Reach Health Communication Interventions (2014 Best Practices for Tobacco Control Programs)

<https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/153233>

## SECTION 12

# Addendum

## SECTION 12: ADDENDUM

### Pitch Templates

#### TEMPLATE 1: Personal Story Angle

Subject: [LOCAL PERSON] defied [X]% odds to quit [X]-year smoking habit—here's how

[JOURNALIST NAME],

I wanted to connect you with [NAME], a [AGE]-year-old [OCCUPATION] from [CITY] who recently quit smoking after [X] years—and [HIS/HER] story illustrates both the challenge and possibility of tobacco cessation.

[NAME] tried quitting [X] times before succeeding with support from [STATE] quitline. [HIS/HER] story includes [compelling element].

What makes [NAME]'s story particularly timely: [tie to current event, observance, or trend].

Key story elements:

- [Specific compelling detail]
- [Health impact or life change]
- [Broader relevance to audience]

[NAME] is comfortable sharing [HIS/HER] experience on camera/for print.

I can also provide:

- Additional context about tobacco use in [STATE]
- Expert perspective from quitline director
- Data on quit success rates

Would [DATE/TIME] work for a brief call? [NAME] is available [TIMEFRAME].

[YOUR NAME]

[CONTACT INFO]

**TEMPLATE 2: Research/Data Release Angle**

Subject: NEW DATA: [STATE] sees [trend] in [tobacco use metric]

[JOURNALIST NAME],

New data released [today/this week] reveals [surprising/concerning/encouraging] trends in [STATE]'s tobacco use.

Key findings:

- [Most newsworthy data point with context]
- [Second significant finding]
- [Third finding or comparison to national trends]

This represents a [X]% [increase/decrease] from [previous period], meaning [real-world impact].

For context and local perspective, I can connect you with:

- [NAME], [TITLE], who can explain what's driving these trends
- Former smokers/parents/providers affected by these trends

Given [upcoming observance/legislative session], this seems particularly relevant for your audience.

[YOUR NAME]

[CONTACT INFO]

**TEMPLATE 3: Program Launch/Innovation Angle**

Subject: [STATE] quitline launches [NEW SERVICE]—first in region to offer [KEY BENEFIT]

[JOURNALIST NAME],

[STATE QUITLINE NAME] is launching [NEW SERVICE] starting [DATE], becoming [first in state/region] to offer [KEY INNOVATION].

This matters because [barrier being removed or need being addressed].

What's new: [Brief description—2-3 sentences]

Why now: [Connect to trend or demand]

Impact potential:

- [Population that will benefit]
- [Estimated reach]
- [Barriers removed]

For your story, I can provide:

- Interviews with [quitline director]
- Demonstration of the new service
- Former smokers who requested this support
- Data on demand that prompted the launch

This launches [DATE]. Are you available for a brief call [DATES/TIMES]?

[YOUR NAME]

[CONTACT INFO]

**TEMPLATE 4: Health Observance Tie-In**

Subject: [HEALTH OBSERVANCE]: [LOCAL ANGLE] + resources for [COMMUNITY]

[JOURNALIST NAME],

With [OBSERVANCE] coming up on [DATE], I wanted to share a local angle that might resonate with your audience.

Local angle: [State-specific data, local story, community event]

Broader context:

- [National statistic or trend]
- [How your state compares]
- [What this means for residents]

Timely actions/resources:

- [STATE] quitline is offering [special promotion] during [OBSERVANCE]
- [Number] residents have quit with quitline support this year
- Free resources include [coaching, medications, text support]

I can connect you with:

- [Former smoker with compelling story]
- [Health official who can speak to local patterns]

Given the [DATE] observance, would a story that week work? Happy to discuss further.

[YOUR NAME]

[CONTACT INFO]

**TEMPLATE 5: Reactive/Newsjacking Angle**

Subject: LOCAL REACTION: [STATE] expert responds to [breaking news]

[JOURNALIST NAME],

Following [today's announcement/this week's study] about [topic], I wanted to offer local perspective on what this means for [STATE] residents.

What happened: [1-2 sentence summary]

Local impact: [How this specifically affects your state]

[STATE] response: [Your expert's position—2-3 sentences]

Available for immediate interview: [NAME], [TITLE], can speak to:

- How this affects [STATE] tobacco users
- Local data that supports/contrasts with findings
- Resources available for concerned residents

[NAME] is available [TIMEFRAME TODAY].

[YOUR NAME]

[CONTACT INFO]

**TEMPLATE 6: Visual/Event Announcement**

Subject: VISUAL STORY: [EVENT] on [DATE]—powerful imagery + interviews

[JOURNALIST NAME],

[ORGANIZATION] is hosting [EVENT] on [DATE] at [LOCATION], and I think it offers strong visual storytelling opportunities.

What you'll see: [Describe visual elements concretely]

The story: [Brief context—why this is happening]

Interview opportunities:

- [Former smoker/participant]
- [Health official]
- [Event participants]

Logistics:

- When: [DATE/TIME]
- Where: [LOCATION with parking/access]
- Duration: [How long; best time for coverage]

What makes this timely: [Tie to current events or observance]

Would this work for coverage on [TARGET DATE]?

[YOUR NAME]

[CELL PHONE for day-of]

**TEMPLATE 7: Exclusive/Embargo Pitch**

Subject: EXCLUSIVE FIRST LOOK: [Announcement] embargoed until [DATE]

[JOURNALIST NAME],

I'm offering you first access to [announcement] before it becomes public on [DATE].

What we're announcing: [Clear description]

Why this is significant: [Impact, scale, newsworthiness]

Embargo details:

- Information provided now for background
- Story can publish/air on [DATE/TIME]
- Exclusive window until [TIME]

What I'm offering exclusively:

- [Early access to data]
- [First interview with spokesperson]
- [Behind-the-scenes access]

I chose to approach you first because of your strong coverage of [related topic].

Are you interested? I need confirmation by [DATE].

[YOUR NAME]

[CONTACT INFO]

Template “Swiss Cheese” Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE [DATE - Partner fills in]

MEDIA CONTACT: [Partner fills in: Name, Title, Phone, Email]

[COMMUNITY NAME] Joins Statewide Great American Smokeout Campaign

[Pre-written: 2-3 sentences about Great American Smokeout and its purpose]

[CITY, STATE] – [DATE] – [LOCAL ORGANIZATION NAME] is participating in the American Cancer Society's Great American Smokeout on [DATE], joining communities statewide in encouraging tobacco users to make a plan to quit or plan to make a quit attempt.

[Pre-written: State smoking statistics - X% of State adults smoke, costing \$X in healthcare] [BLANK - Partner fills in: Local smoking statistics or health impact data for their community] "

[BLANK - Partner fills in: Quote from local official about why this matters to their community and available support]," said [BLANK - Name and Title].

[Pre-written: Description of quitline services - free coaching, medication, text support, etc.]

[BLANK - Optional: Partner fills in local events, activities, or resources specific to their community] [Pre-written: How to access quitline services with phone number, text option, website] [Pre-written: Boilerplate about state quitline]

[Optional BLANK: Local organization boilerplate if partner wants to include]

###

## Editorial Calendar (Full Year Sample)

### Q1 2026 (January - March)

Date/Week	Observance	Target Audience	Key Messages	Tactics
Jan 1	New Year's Resolutions	Current smokers	New year = fresh start; free resources available	Social media campaign; quitline promotion
Jan 11	62nd Anniversary Surgeon General's Report	Media, policymakers	How far we've come; work still to do	Media advisory; historical timeline; op-ed
Jan 20-24	National Birth Defects Prevention Week	Pregnant women, providers	Smoking increases birth defect risk; specialized counseling available	OB/GYN toolkit; social media
Feb (all)	American Heart Month + Black History Month	African American communities, heart disease risk	Menthol targeting; smoking is leading cause of heart disease	Barbershop/salon outreach; faith partnerships
Feb 4	World Cancer Day	Cancer survivors, at-risk	Quitting reduces cancer risk at any age	Survivor testimonial; coalition partnership
Feb 7	National Wear Red Day	Women 40+	Women who smoke have 25% higher heart attack risk	Social media; women's health org partnerships
Mar 17	Kick Butts Day	Youth, educators	Youth activism against Big Tobacco	Youth-led social takeover; school toolkit
Mar 20	First Day of Spring	Current smokers	Spring cleaning = fresh start	"Spring into Quitting" campaign

## Q2 2026 (April - June)

Date/Week	Observance	Target Audience	Key Messages	Tactics
Apr 7	World Health Day	General public, policymakers	Tobacco is most preventable cause of death	Media pitch; op-ed on health equity
Apr 22	Earth Day	Environmental advocates	Cigarette butts are #1 littered item	Cleanup partnership; environmental media
May (all)	Physical Fitness Month	Active adults	Smoking cuts athletic performance; quitting improves lung capacity	Gym partnerships; 5K sponsorship
May 10	Mother's Day	Mothers who smoke	Best gift = your health	"Quit for Mom" campaign; earned media
May 31	World No Tobacco Day	Global health community	WHO theme focus; local action	Major media push; press event; social thunderclap
Jun (all)	Men's Health Month + Pride Month	Men, LGBTQ+	Industry targeting; inclusive cessation support	Barbershop outreach; Pride presence
Jun 21	Father's Day	Fathers	Be around for milestones	"Quit for Dad" campaign

### Q3 2026 (July - September)

Date/Week	Observance	Target Audience	Key Messages	Tactics
Jul 4	Independence Day	General public	Declare independence from Big Tobacco	Community event booths
Aug (all)	Immunization Awareness Month	Parents, providers	Smoking weakens immune system; smoke-free homes	Back-to-school clinic partnerships
Aug 31	Back-to-School	Parents, students, staff	Tobacco-free school year; protecting kids from vaping	School supply drive; PTA presentations
Sep 10	World Suicide Prevention Day	Mental health community	Smoking linked to depression/anxiety; quitting improves mental health	Mental health partnerships; provider education
Sep 29	World Heart Day	Heart disease patients, cardiologists	Smoking is #1 preventable cause; never too late	Cardiology partnerships; testimonials

## Q4 2026 (October - December)

Date/Week	Observance	Target Audience	Key Messages	Tactics
Oct (all)	Breast Cancer Awareness Month	Women, survivors, oncology	Smoking increases breast cancer risk; quitting improves treatment	Pink partnerships; survivor stories
Oct 10	World Mental Health Day	Mental health community	Smoking worsens anxiety/depression; integrated treatment	Provider grand rounds; social media
Nov (all)	Lung Cancer Awareness + Native American Heritage	Lung cancer patients, Native communities	#1 cancer killer; sacred vs commercial tobacco	Screening center partnerships; tribal health
Nov 11	Veterans Day	Veterans, military families	High veteran smoking rates; specialized resources	VA partnerships; veteran stories
Nov 19	Great American Smokeout	Current smokers, entire state	Biggest quit day of year; community support	Statewide media blitz; employer challenges; healthcare mobilization; community events
Nov 26	Thanksgiving	Families	Gratitude for health; protecting family gatherings	"Thankful to be Tobacco-Free" campaign
Dec 31	New Year's Eve	Current smokers	Resolve to quit in 2027	Resolution prep content; year-end push

### Planning Notes:

- **Lead Times:** Major events need 3-4 months planning; features need 3-4 weeks pitching; op-eds need 2-3 weeks
- **November Cluster:** Create thematic arc across GASO, Lung Cancer Month, COPD Month; batch content in October
- **White Space:** Leave 30-40% open for responsive opportunities and team capacity

## Annual Tobacco Control & Related Health Observances – Canada

Month	Observance/Event	Date/Timing	Category
January	National Non-Smoking Week	Third full week	Tobacco Control
January	Weedless Wednesday	Wednesday of Non-Smoking Week	Tobacco Control
January	National Birth Defects Prevention Month	All month	Pregnancy/Infant
February	Canadian Heart Month	All month	Cardiovascular
February	National Cancer Prevention Month	All month	Cancer
February	World Cancer Day	Feb 4	Cancer
February	National Wear Red Day	First Friday	Cardiovascular
March	Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month	All month	Cancer
March	National Diabetes Alert Day	Fourth Tuesday	Other
April	National Cancer Control Month	All month	Cancer
April	Head and Neck Cancer Awareness Month	All month	Cancer
May	Skin Cancer Awareness Month	All month	Cancer
May	Asthma Awareness Month	All month	Respiratory
May	Stroke Awareness Month	All month	Cardiovascular
May	World Asthma Day	First Tuesday	Respiratory
May	World No Tobacco Day	May 31	Tobacco Control
June	National Cancer Survivors Day	First Sunday	Cancer
September	Atrial Fibrillation Awareness Month	All month	Cardiovascular
September	World Heart Day	Sep 29	Cardiovascular
October	Breast Cancer Awareness Month	All month	Cancer
October	National Health Education Week	Third full week	Tobacco Control

Month	Observance/Event	Date/Timing	Category
November	Lung Cancer Awareness Month	All month	Cancer
November	Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month	All month	Cancer
November	COPD Awareness Month	All month	Respiratory
November	Diabetes Awareness Month	All month	Other
November	Premature Birth Awareness Month	All month	Pregnancy/Infant
November	World Prematurity Day	Nov 17	Pregnancy/Infant
November	World COPD Day	Third Wednesday	Respiratory

**Notes:**

- Canada does not have an equivalent to the U.S. Great American Smokeout
- National Non-Smoking Week has been coordinated by the Canadian Council for Tobacco Control for over 40 years
- Many observances align with international WHO/global campaigns

## PRINT MEDIA CHECKLIST

### BEFORE THE PITCH

- Prepare detailed background materials (2-3 pages)
- Compile comprehensive statistics with sources
- Identify 3-5 potential sources representing different perspectives
- Create data visualizations (charts, graphs, infographics)
- Prepare high-resolution photos (minimum 300 DPI)

### IN YOUR PITCH

- Emphasize story's depth and complexity
- Offer multiple angles
- Mention availability of data, research, expert sources
- Reference their related coverage

### MATERIALS TO PROVIDE

- Written fact sheet with key statistics
- Contact information for all sources (availability confirmed)
- High-resolution images with captions
- Data sets or links to original research
- Infographics in editable formats

### FOR INTERVIEWS

- Prepare longer, detailed responses
- Bring supporting documents to reference
- Be ready to explain methodology
- Offer to follow up with additional information

# TELEVISION CHECKLIST

## BEFORE THE PITCH

- Identify strong visual elements
- Confirm spokesperson availability and camera-readiness
- Prepare B-roll footage or plan B-roll shoot access
- Develop 3-5 key soundbites (7-12 seconds each)
- Scout potential filming locations
- Arrange necessary permissions

## IN YOUR PITCH

- Lead with visual hook
- Mention B-roll availability immediately
- Specify spokesperson availability and location
- Keep pitch brief
- Offer to facilitate all logistics

## MATERIALS TO PROVIDE

- Pre-produced B-roll package on shared drive
- List of visual elements/filming opportunities
- Spokesperson biography
- One-page story summary
- Contact sheet with day-of coordinator

## FOR INTERVIEWS

- Wear solid colors (avoid busy patterns, all white, all black)
- Arrive 15-20 minutes early
- Practice soundbites (7-12 seconds)
- Speak in complete sentences
- Maintain eye contact with interviewer (not camera unless instructed)
- Include quiline contact info when natural

## DAY-OF LOGISTICS

- Confirm all participants present
- Have signed release forms ready
- Minimize background noise
- Capture behind-the-scenes for your social media

# RADIO CHECKLIST

## BEFORE THE PITCH

- Develop 3-5 talking points in conversational language
- Practice speaking clearly at moderate pace
- Prepare concise answers (30-45 seconds for longer formats)
- Identify natural sound opportunities
- Confirm spokesperson has clear speaking voice

## IN YOUR PITCH

- Emphasize storytelling/personal narrative angle
- Mention spokesperson is engaging on-air
- Offer studio or phone/remote interview
- Note time-sensitive hooks

## MATERIALS TO PROVIDE

- One-page talking points
- Key statistics (phonetic spellings if complex)
- Spokesperson bio
- Quitline contact info in multiple formats
- Suggested questions for host

## FOR INTERVIEWS

- Test audio connection beforehand
- Use landline or high-quality connection
- Eliminate background noise
- Speak clearly at moderate pace
- Use descriptive language (paint verbal pictures)
- Smile while talking (comes through in voice)
- Keep talking points visible for reference

# LONGER-FORM MEDIA CHECKLIST

## INITIAL ENGAGEMENT

- Understand timeline and format (article, podcast, documentary)
- Discuss scope and angle thoroughly
- Identify potential characters/narrative opportunities
- Gauge level of access required
- Clarify your role (primary source, facilitator, background)

## ACCESS FACILITATION

- Identify compelling characters for narrative
- Connect journalist with willing long-term participants
- Facilitate access to operations (with privacy protections)
- Arrange interviews with counselors, officials, partners
- Secure necessary releases and permissions

## MATERIALS TO PROVIDE

- Comprehensive background materials
- Historical context and program evolution
- Complete data sets
- Policy documents and legislation
- Previous media coverage
- Academic research and citations
- Contact information for diverse sources
- Timeline of key events

## ONGOING SUPPORT

- Maintain regular communication throughout reporting
- Respond promptly to requests (even months later)
- Be available for fact-checking
- Note time-sensitive hooks
- Provide updates on relevant developments
- Don't pressure about publication timeline

## FOR INTERVIEWS

- Block substantial time (60-90+ minutes, possibly multiple sessions)
- Prepare to discuss in depth
- Bring supporting documents
- Be candid about challenges, not just successes
- Allow observation when possible

## Buzzworthy Media Tactics & Ideas

TACTIC	WHAT IT IS	WHY IT WORKS	HOW TO EXECUTE	KEY CONSIDERATIONS
Installations & Artistic Displays	Visual installations that transform abstract health statistics into concrete, photographable realities	Creates visually striking moments that stop people in their tracks and compel sharing; provides strong photo/video opportunities for media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Giant cigarette installations visualizing scale of problem</li> <li>"Cemetery" displays with tombstones representing tobacco deaths</li> <li>Visual timelines of tobacco industry marketing evolution</li> <li>Interactive art from discarded tobacco products</li> <li>Pop-up exhibits in high-traffic areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Place in locations with heavy foot traffic</li> <li>Ensure installations are photo-worthy</li> <li>Coordinate with property owners for permissions</li> </ul>
Tobacco Memorials	Events and displays honoring individuals lost to tobacco-related disease	Taps into profound human cost while providing personal connection; brings faces and names to statistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Memorial walls or quilts honoring those lost</li> <li>Annual remembrance events during health observances</li> <li>Photo exhibits featuring families impacted by tobacco</li> <li>Partner with health departments, hospice organizations, cancer support groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure proper consent from families</li> <li>Provide support networks for participants; handle sensitive stories with care</li> </ul>
Tobacco Toll Demonstrations	Visual representations that make	Humanizes statistics through concrete visual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shoe displays (pairs)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider community sensitivity for controversial displays</li> </ul>

TACTIC	WHAT IT IS	WHY IT WORKS	HOW TO EXECUTE	KEY CONSIDERATIONS
	abstract death/disease numbers impossible to ignore	metaphors; creates memorable images that media can't ignore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>representing deaths)</li> <li>Body bag displays (use carefully, appropriate for critical policy moments)</li> <li>Cigarettes laid end-to-end showing consumption; Before/after health visualizations</li> <li>Mobile exhibits for multiple venues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create mobile versions for maximum ROI</li> <li>Document with strong photography</li> </ul>
Rallies	Organized gatherings that generate energy, visibility, and media coverage	Mobilizes supporters; creates timely news hooks; provides strong visuals and footage for media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth-led advocacy rallies at state capitols during sessions</li> <li>Community rallies coordinating with policy votes/observances</li> <li>Virtual rallies when in-person challenging</li> <li>Coordinate with coalition partners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure strong visual elements (signs, banners, speakers)</li> <li>Balance emotional resonance with clear policy demands</li> <li>Amplify through partner networks</li> </ul>
Impact Demonstrations	Displays showing tangible evidence of tobacco's proliferation and consequences	Expose scope of often-invisible problems; provides hard news hooks backed by data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>E-cigarette product collections showing youth-targeted items</li> <li>Sting operation results announcement</li> <li>Vape waste environmental impact displays</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with enforcement agencies for credibility</li> <li>Include marketing materials showing youth targeting</li> <li>Document with strong visuals</li> </ul>

TACTIC	WHAT IT IS	WHY IT WORKS	HOW TO EXECUTE	KEY CONSIDERATIONS
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nicotine/chemical content comparisons</li> <li>• Interactive health impact simulations (breathing resistance devices)</li> </ul>	
Cleanups	Community cleanup events focusing on cigarette butts and tobacco waste	Demonstrates environmental impact; engages volunteers; generates coverage of waste volumes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beach/park cleanups highlighting tobacco waste</li> <li>• Partner with environmental organizations</li> <li>• Document before/after, pounds collected, volunteer numbers</li> <li>• Use collected materials for follow-up installations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cross-sector partnerships create "unusual alliance" angles</li> <li>• Photograph scale of collection</li> <li>• Create second media opportunity from collected materials</li> </ul>
Youth Advocacy	Creating opportunities for youth leadership and voice in tobacco control	Youth voices carry unique power; unexpected and emotionally resonant; demonstrates youth investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student-led press conferences and media events</li> <li>• Youth testimony at hearings/council meetings</li> <li>• Peer-to-peer campaigns with youth spokespeople</li> <li>• SWAT or similar coalition activations</li> <li>• Youth-created art, videos, campaigns</li> <li>• School-based events inviting local media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide media training while maintaining authenticity</li> <li>• Create accessible coverage opportunities</li> <li>• Support youth confidence and agency</li> </ul>

TACTIC	WHAT IT IS	WHY IT WORKS	HOW TO EXECUTE	KEY CONSIDERATIONS
<b>Elected Official Partnerships</b>	Collaborations with legislators and government leaders	Adds political weight and newsworthiness; creates formal news events media prioritize	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Joint press conferences on policy/funding</li> <li>Co-authored op-eds showing bipartisan support</li> <li>Facility tours of quitline operations</li> <li>Legislative testimony with media component</li> <li>Bill signing ceremonies</li> <li>Provide talking points/data for officials' communications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build legislative champions through facility visits</li> <li>Time testimony with press availability</li> <li>Supply data for officials to amplify message</li> </ul>
<b>Community Organization Partnerships</b>	Strategic alliances with health, faith, veteran, education organizations	Multiplies resources, reach, and credibility; combines organizational strengths and media lists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Joint events with cancer/lung/heart associations</li> <li>Healthcare provider collaborations</li> <li>Faith-based partnerships for community reach</li> <li>Veterans organizations for military populations</li> <li>School/university partnerships for prevention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate messaging and share media lists</li> <li>Cross-promote across channels</li> <li>Package as "community coming together" angle</li> </ul>
<b>Celebrities, Athletes &amp; Influencers</b>	Partnerships with high-profile individuals	Dramatically amplifies message reach; provides relatable role models; reaches new audiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local sports figures sharing quit stories</li> <li>Cancer survivors with public profiles; News personalities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vet carefully for authenticity and alignment</li> <li>Provide media training and key messages</li> <li>Leverage their existing platforms</li> <li>Prioritize ongoing relationships</li> </ul>

TACTIC	WHAT IT IS	WHY IT WORKS	HOW TO EXECUTE	KEY CONSIDERATIONS
<b>Creating Partnership Media Opportunities</b>			<p>promoting quitline</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Musicians/artists from affected communities</li> <li>• Social media influencers</li> </ul>	
<b>Personal &amp; Authentic Stories (Tips Model)</b>	<p>Strategic co-creation of newsworthy moments with partners</p>	<p>Shares costs while expanding reach; creates reciprocal visibility; generates "unusual alliance" stories</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-host events sharing costs and audiences</li> <li>• Joint press releases distributed through multiple channels</li> <li>• Mutual benefit arrangements (cross-promotion)</li> <li>• Coordinated timing to avoid competing coverage</li> <li>• Templated materials partners can customize</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Package collaboration itself as story angle</li> <li>• Ensure consistent core messaging</li> <li>• Sequence announcements strategically</li> </ul>

TACTIC	WHAT IT IS	WHY IT WORKS	HOW TO EXECUTE	KEY CONSIDERATIONS
<b>Tips Local Market Media Tour</b>	Coordinate media tour with people featured in the CDC Tips campaign to tell their story paired with a local expert to add tobacco control context	Leverages national resources and visibility while localizing impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Follow CDC Tips model: hard-hitting, emotionally evocative</li> <li>Provide media training and ongoing support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use CDC B-roll, spokespeople, research findings</li> <li>Localize national messages with state data</li> <li>Arrange interviews with local officials and participants</li> <li>Provide local quit success stories</li> <li>Time outreach with CDC paid media flights</li> </ul>
<b>Campaign Recruitment</b>	Building pipeline of ready spokespeople and storytellers	Creates database of media-ready voices; enables quick response to opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop recruitment campaigns via advertising/social</li> <li>Partner with healthcare providers for warm introductions</li> <li>Social media crowdsourcing for stories</li> <li>Simple submission process</li> <li>Thorough vetting for appropriateness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build database of trained spokespeople</li> <li>Vet for media readiness</li> <li>Maintain long-term relationships</li> <li>Respond quickly when opportunities arise</li> </ul>

TACTIC	WHAT IT IS	WHY IT WORKS	HOW TO EXECUTE	KEY CONSIDERATIONS
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain relationships with past participants</li> </ul>	