



MAKING THE MEDIA *work for you*

Promoting your WI in local and national media is easier than you might think – but how do you attract the interest of journalists, radio, papers, podcasters and more?

NFWI PR Consultant **Rob Dyson** shares a few expert tips and tricks

The WI is a community. Within it you'll find fun and friendship, and – undeniably – the power of its collective voice too. The pages of *WI Life* are always rich in stories of your mighty talents, generosity and achievements. Plus, we're always excited to see media coverage of what you get up to, featured in local papers or on TV, radio and online, amplifying women's voices and showing the best of the WI movement.

Media coverage supports and strengthens community engagement: it can help raise donations for your local charities and good causes; highlight your campaigning efforts; and challenge assumptions about the WI. It can also encourage more brilliant women to join us – something we always love to see.

We appreciate that not everyone knows where to start when approaching the media. We're told (often *in* the media!) that journalists are time-short, unapproachable or simply aren't

interested in 'good news' stories. The reality couldn't be further from the truth – well, except the time-short bit, perhaps, but aren't we all busy these days, bombarded by the news, social media, and the admin of our lives?

Here, we're going to look at some simple ways that you can work with journalists and local media to tell your stories and celebrate all of the brilliant things about being a member of the WI. The media doesn't have to be scary or elusive – in fact, it can actually be your ally...

1 EVERYTHING STARTS WITH THE PERFECT PRESS RELEASE

We're human, journalists are human. So, if we think about what we find interesting, we can't go far wrong. What's the magic formula? Here are some of the basics of what we might put in ►

a press release – essentially one side of a piece of A4 paper or a Word document page, but it can just as simply be written into the body of an email.

THE WHAT First, say what is happening. Are you holding an event to campaign on an issue? Hosting a bake sale? Have you invited an interesting person from your local area to speak to your WI? In essence, what’s going on? The editor reading your press release will want to know immediately what they’re being invited to cover, so lead with that simple information.

THE WHY Why is this happening? Your event may be in support of our Clean Rivers campaign. The bake sale is a fundraiser for a local charity – great, which one? Why are you inviting that speaker to your local WI – to learn new skills or hear about an important issue, perhaps? Add the why to the what.

THE WHERE Your campaign event is happening in your local town centre. Maybe your bake sale is being held outside a church. Your WI is meeting in a room in a library or pub. Here’s where you tell the media – and the readers, viewers or listeners – where they need to come to, if that’s the aim.

THE WHEN When is this happening? You will want to consider giving plenty of notice – but not too much. (Eight months ahead and everyone will have forgotten!) For an event, two weeks is usually good. And if it has already happened and you’re providing a report or update, do still include the date so that the journalist knows it’s still relevant to cover in the paper.

ADD QUOTES It’s much more interesting to hear from someone who is affected by your story, so always try to include a quote from a WI member, someone from the charity you’re supporting, or even an external expert on your campaign issue. This will add colour and personality, and increase the likelihood of your story being covered. Always bring it back to the community – that way it’s more likely to appeal to and be covered by local news.

THE HOW (AND WHO TO CONTACT) At the end, tell the journalist how they can find out more: how to get in touch with you via a WI facebook page, website, email, or a phone number, with permissions cleared, of course.

2 FIND THE RIGHT MEDIA OUTLET FOR YOUR STORY

Now you have your story ready, where should you pitch it?

Local newspapers

First, read your target newspapers. Get a feel for the style of the articles, and the names of the editors and journalists who cover stories similar to the ones you want to tell. Write down the relevant email addresses and phone numbers to contact. And always think about how pictures will help to tell your story. Local media loves a good, clear photo and sending a selection may significantly improve your chances of success.



The key things to remember when approaching your local paper, usually by email, are:

- **The publication date** – what day of the week does it land in shops and on doorsteps?
- **The best time of day to pitch a story** – go for earlier in the morning, before journalists set about writing their stories.
- **The readership** – this will usually be local people, so include plenty of community detail in your story.

Online news

Sources for news on the web are updated more regularly, so traditional publication dates may not matter. You’ll still need to find out the best person to contact with your news, though – and consider photography even more important. When we read news online, we are naturally drawn to stories with images, so send a selection – or make it clear in your approach that good-quality photography from the event is available on request.

Local radio and TV

Radio is interested in sound (funnily enough!) and TV in pictures – so, when reaching out to these media, invite them to something where they can capture the story in audio and visuals respectively. A great location goes a long way and a good journalist will likely have suggestions too. A fantastic example of a radio report is the 2023 charity skinny dip by Rothbury WI, Northumberland Federation. The group invited an all-female local radio crew to the beach, to interview members and record the event – and the sounds of the shrieks and splashes as the women dived into the chilly waters at 8am made for brilliant radio! Plus, the power of doing something amazing and out of the ordinary to raise funds really came through in the Rothbury WI members’ voices in the interviews too.

Social media

Whether it’s Facebook, Instagram, X or another platform, many journalists use social to seek stories, and may even put out requests involving particular themes or certain groups. So it’s worth following both the media brand (your local news group or TV or radio station) and the individual journalists who are covering local issues (credited in the papers or on the TV or radio). Throw some national journalists into the mix too – the ones whose bylines you see in your favourite paper, magazine or news site.

SOME RULES FOR APPROACHING JOURNALISTS ONLINE

- **DON’T BE SPAMMY** Only tag or contact a journalist if you have a story relevant to their ‘patch’ or interests.
- **BE POLITE** No one is obliged to cover a story based on a tweet. If they don’t reply, don’t take it personally.
- **DON’T DM THEM** Sending direct/private messages to a journalist in the first instance can seem pushy and intrusive. Once you’ve struck up an online conversation, they will likely give you an email address or number that you can use to continue it.

3 START A MEDIA CONTACTS BOOK FOR YOUR WI

Getting a story in the media doesn’t have to be a ‘one and done’ deal. Building relationships can mean more coverage in the future, which will help your WI or federation in the long term – so start a database of friendly journalists and outlets. Make sure you update it regularly so you don’t waste time emailing someone who’s moved jobs or a platform that’s closed down.

Add other media professionals to your database as you discover them: local photographers or videographers, for example, who might cover an event for you, or podcasters in your area who may want to feature a representative from the WI movement.



A PICTURE SPEAKS...

A lot of smartphones have decent cameras, but it’s how you take a shot which will determine whether it’s used or binned. And this could make all the difference to placing a story.

REMEMBER...

- **LIGHT IT UP** Take a picture in the best-possible light. Switch on as many lights on as you can if indoors. Modern cameras and phones have some good flashes, but these can bleach out faces or make the people in your portrait blink. Natural light is best.
- **HOLD STEADY!** If using a smartphone, consider propping it up on something flat, or even using a mini tripod. Many an image is spoiled by a shaky hand.
- **GET IN THE FRAME** Think about the subject of your scene. If the people or things you want in shot are way too small – engulfed in too much background – your key image will blur when the picture is cropped or enlarged for the paper or web. Make sure the subject is front and centre, but of course include anything relevant to the story.
- **RELAX, AND TRY A CANDID SHOT:** An image of 30 WI members standing in a line at the back of an empty community centre, like an old-fashioned school portrait, won’t work on the page. Get everyone to mingle, chat, or pose in smaller groups and have someone fire off a series of photos so the journalist has a good choice – and a sense of what the event was actually like.

Photography: iSTOCK



4 BE READY TO BE INTERVIEWED

Did you get a ‘bite’? Congratulations! If you’re getting ready to speak to a journalist interested in your story, make sure you’re prepped. Over-preparation is good – but remember to keep your three key messages foremost in your mind. Think: why the event is happening, what you are hoping to achieve, and why life in the WI is great! The cliché of the crafty journalist trying to catch you out is largely untrue – most of the time, a local writer is willing you to be interesting and to say something that will help them bring the story to life for their readers.

Take your time and speak naturally. The journalist has already the What, Why, Where and When – so you are adding the colour and heft, the human touch. And again, as it’s the WI, do talk about what you get out of being a member. Get across how brilliant the WI is – remember, potential future members could be listening, and you might inspire women to join you.

5 ALWAYS FOLLOW UP SOON AFTER THE STORY APPEARS

When you get that lovely coverage in the paper, on TV, radio or online, treat it like the start of a beautiful friendship:

- **Send a thank you.** A little appreciation goes a long way and, after the initial contact, is the second step to building a good relationship for future coverage. Journalists get sent hundreds of stories from local people, so be nice about the fact they covered yours.
- **Keep them updated.** Ask if you can keep the journalist up to date with your news in the future – say you’ll stay in touch, then follow up with any progress, on a campaign or a fundraiser, for instance. Again, don’t spam them, but targeted updates are fine.
- **Ask what you can do for them, going forward.** You could offer to write a regular WI column, or invite a journalist to visit a WI meeting and write a piece on the experience. For broadcast media, ask them to add your WI to their ‘experts’ list to comment on women’s issues or stories about WI-relevant subjects, such as friendship, or any of our campaign issues such as climate change.

And finally... Remember, NFWI is here to support you. For general advice and ideas, contact the Membership team at membership@nfwl.org.uk – and *WI Life* always loves to hear what you’re up to, so send the details to wilife@nfwl.org.uk. Now, go tell the world about your WI!