Telling Your Story:
A Media Guide for Wispact Grantees

Introduction

Congratulations on receiving a grant from Wispact! This guide is designed to help your organization share this exciting news with your community, build awareness about your mission, and foster relationships with the media.

Even if you have little or no experience working with the media, this document provides practical steps and supportive advice to help you feel confident in promoting your work and your grant award.

The Power of Storytelling

At the heart of every successful media campaign is a compelling story. For nonprofits, storytelling isn't just a communication strategy—it's how we share our mission, values, and the human impact of our work.

A well-crafted story can transform a simple grant announcement into a meaningful narrative that captures the attention of media outlets and social media audiences alike. Stories foster emotional connections, build empathy, and illustrate how your organization changes lives. They allow people to see themselves in your mission and feel inspired to support it.

To craft a compelling story, focus on the people behind your programs. Highlight one individual or family whose life has been impacted by your work—ideally someone who will benefit from the Wispact-funded initiative. Provide specific details: what challenges they faced, how your organization helped, and what changed as a result. Always obtain consent before sharing personal stories, and use respectful, inclusive language.

Great nonprofit stories also include a clear message: why your mission matters, what this grant allows you to do, and what outcomes you expect. Pair this narrative with visuals, quotes, or data to add credibility and depth. Remember, a story isn't just about the past—it's a bridge to your organization's future and an invitation for others to join you.

Why Media Coverage Matters

Securing media coverage can help your nonprofit:

- Build Community Support and Trust
- Attract New Donors and Volunteers
- Show Accountability to Funders and Board of Directors
- Inspire Others Through the Success of your Programs
- Celebrate Your Impact With the People You Serve
- Highlight the Importance of Public Investment in Inclusive, Community-Based Solutions

Media visibility is an opportunity to demonstrate leadership, expand outreach, and spark partnerships. Done thoughtfully, it can strengthen your organization's long-term impact.

Getting Started: Press Release Basics

Write a Press Release

A well-crafted press release can serve as the foundation of your outreach. Here's what to include:

- Headline: Use an active voice to announce your Wispact grant award.
- Lead Paragraph: Provide the "who, what, when, where, why" in the first few lines.
- Body: Include a quote from your executive director, describe the program funded, and provide a few stats or success stories.
- Boilerplate: Add a short "About Us" section for your organization and for Wispact.
- Contact Info: Always include a name, email, and phone number for media inquiries.

Distribute Your Press Release

- Local Media Outlets: Visit websites of local newspapers, radio stations, and TV stations to submit your release via online portals or newsroom emails.
- Online News Aggregators: Consider submitting your release to online regional news platforms like Patch, Madison365, or community bulletin boards.
- Email: Build a local media list including community reporters, news editors, and nonprofit beat journalists. Keep the email short and professional.
- Social Media: Post the release or a story summary with a link to your site on Facebook, Twitter/X, LinkedIn, and Instagram. Use a compelling image and tag Wispact and relevant partners.
- Newsletter: Include the announcement in your next email newsletter.

Online & Social Media Amplification

Build an Online Presence

Even if your organization is small, a basic digital footprint is essential.

- Keep your website updated with current news and events.
- Create a "News" or "Press" page to share press releases, media coverage, and downloadable materials.
- Link to your social media platforms.

Leverage Social Media Effectively

Facebook: Post about your Wispact grant with a photo or video, and tag Wispact.
Twitter/X: Use hashtags relevant to disability rights, nonprofit work, and Wisconsin news (e.g., #Wispact, #DisabilityEquity, #NonprofitWI).
Instagram: Share behind-the-scenes images of your work and impact stories.
LinkedIn: Share professional updates, especially when connecting with funders and partners.

Encourage staff, board members, and supporters to share and engage with your posts.

Connect With Digital Media Outlets

In addition to traditional media, online-only outlets are powerful platforms that can help amplify your message to a wider audience. These include:

- Local and regional bloggers who focus on community news, nonprofit stories, or issues affecting people with disabilities.
- Podcast hosts who produce shows related to advocacy, accessibility, social justice, or philanthropy.
- Social media influencers with strong followings in Wisconsin, disability communities, or nonprofit sectors.
- Online publications that specialize in civic news, diversity and inclusion, or healthcare.

How to connect effectively:

Do your research: Look for digital media creators who align with your mission and values. Follow them on social media and read or listen to their content.

Personalize your outreach: Write a short, sincere message introducing your organization, your Wispact grant, and why you think their audience would care. Make your pitch brief and heartfelt.

Offer a story or angle: Suggest a unique angle, such as how the grant will help a specific underserved group or launch a new program. Include a few relevant statistics or an impactful anecdote.

Be a resource: Offer yourself or a colleague as a guest or source. For example, "We'd love to join your podcast to talk about disability advocacy in rural Wisconsin."

Send visuals: If reaching out via email or DM, include a compelling image, infographic, or short video that brings your story to life.

Track your results: Create a spreadsheet of whom you contact, their platform details, and any responses or coverage. Follow up professionally after a week if you haven't heard back.

Examples of platforms to explore:

- Wisconsin Public Radio podcasts
- Local Patch editions
- Regional Facebook groups (e.g., "Wisconsin Nonprofits Network")
- State-based disability advocates on Instagram or LinkedIn

By building relationships with these digital media voices, you increase your reach, diversify your audience, and foster community engagement beyond traditional newsrooms.

Meet the Media: Rules for Success in Media Interviews

Before the Interview

- Know the focus: Ask what the reporter's angle is, whether others are being interviewed, and how the story will be used.
- Prepare key messages: Identify three to five clear points that highlight the significance of your grant and how it will benefit the community.
- Practice answers: Use concise, jargon-free language. Practice speaking aloud or with a colleague.
- Know your role: You represent your entire organization. Make sure your comments align with your mission and messaging.

During the Interview

- Stay calm and focused: You are the expert. Be clear and speak to the broader community.

- Keep answers short: Responses under 20 seconds are ideal. If you speak too long, the best parts may not be used.
- Bridge back to your message: If a question is off-topic, acknowledge it and return to your key points.
- Avoid speculation: If unsure, say, "I'll follow up with accurate details."
- Stick to the facts: Avoid exaggerating. Share accurate stats or stories, and cite your sources.

If You Make a Mistake

- Stop. Take a breath. Say, "Let me clarify," and restate your point.

Repeat Your Key Messages

Reporters may ask the same question multiple times to get a shorter or clearer response. Use this as a chance to reinforce your core message.

Body Language, Appearance, and Voice

Body Language

- Sit or stand upright with shoulders back.
- Avoid nervous gestures: no foot tapping, hair pulling, or rocking.
- Make natural eye contact with the reporter, not the camera.
- Use open, friendly gestures but avoid pointing or crossing your arms.

Hair and Makeup

- Choose solid, mid-tone colors. Avoid patterns, houndstooth, or high-contrast outfits.
- Keep accessories minimal and professional.
- Light makeup (for all genders) is helpful to reduce shine on camera.

Voice and Delivery

- Speak from your diaphragm. Lower pitch tends to sound more confident.
- Smile when appropriate. It helps your voice sound warm.
- Avoid monotone speech. Let your enthusiasm come through naturally.

After the Interview

Follow-Up Steps

- Ask about publication date or air time. Respect that timing is often out of the reporter's hands.
- Correct inaccuracies respectfully. If the story has factual errors, contact the journalist directly and provide a correction.
- Say thank you. A short email or call shows appreciation and builds relationships.

Celebrate and Share the Story

- Post the article or segment on your website.
- Share the coverage via email newsletters and social media.
- Tag Wispact and local partners.
- Include links in your grant reports or future applications as proof of community engagement.

Grant Acknowledgment Language

Use the following example in interviews, press releases, or publications: "This program is supported by a grant from Wispact, a nonprofit organization that enhances the lives of people with disabilities across Wisconsin through the management of special needs trusts and community-based support."

Building Long-Term Media Relationships

- Keep a list of reporters who cover nonprofits or disability topics.
- Reach out a few times a year with updates, success stories, or event invites.
- Offer to serve as a source for stories about your field.
- Remember: Reporters are people too. Treat them with respect and professionalism.

Final Thoughts

You are doing meaningful work that deserves to be seen and celebrated. Telling your story publicly not only uplifts your community but also strengthens your organization's visibility and credibility.
You don't need to be a communications expert. Start with the basics: be genuine, stay focused, and highlight the impact of your work.

If you need assistance developing a press release, navigating media outreach, or sharing your grant news online, Wispact is here to support you. Feel free to reach out to our contract marketing consultant and author of this guide: Wayne Glowac, (608) 573-0121 or wayneg@orionmadison.com

Thank you for all you do to build a more inclusive Wisconsin. This guide was created to empower Wisconsin nonprofits and community organizations in sharing the news of their Wispact grant. We are proud to partner with you and celebrate your success.