Australian Aid
Local Media Engagement
Your Guide to Influencing Local Media

Engaging local media is one of the most effective ways we can help influence public and political opinion in support for a generous Australian aid program.

Local newspapers and radio stations are great platforms for raising issues that matter to local community members and highlighting ways that schools, churches and local community groups are taking action to advocate for a better, fairer Australia.

It would be a mistake to underestimate the influence of local media on the attitudes of the public and of politicians. Local newspapers and radio stations are – to state the obvious – read and listened to by local people. They are a source of information, news, advertising and entertainment for people in a relatively close-knit geographical community.

Members of Parliament always monitor local media. Politicians need to stay alert to issues of concern to locals – the kind of thing that might be raised in letters to the editor – and are always on the lookout for opportunities to appear in a positive light in the local media.

Local newspapers and radio stations are often in need of interesting local content and are often willing to publish stories proposed or sent in to them by local people and community groups.

Engaging with local media is, therefore, a potentially powerful, and relatively easy, way to reach your community and local politicians, in support of Australian aid.

The key ways to contribute to local media are:

- Writing a letter to the editor
- Inviting local media to your event or contributing a news article
- Calling in to a talkback radio discussion or giving an interview on local radio

Each is a potentially powerful way to influence public and political attitudes and some tips for doing each one successfully are outlined below.
GENERAL TIPS

Be timely:
If you are responding to an article or letter that has appeared in the local paper or about an event that has already occurred, you should aim to provide your response in time for the next issue of a newspaper or the next relevant talkback program for community radio. If you are writing about an event that is about to occur, you should ideally contact your local media at a time when the topic has entered the media cycle and is a subject of discussion, community awareness or concern, or close enough to the event so that people can see it's relevance to local community life.

Highlight local connections:
It might sound obvious, but make sure it is clear that you have a local connection or angle on the story in the first paragraph. This might be as simple as noting that a local church is engaged in an activity, or highlighting the way that local people and schools have contributed to volunteering overseas.

Look for an interesting angle:
If you can write something that offers a new insight or surprising take on an old issue, it will make it more likely to be aired or published, such as unexpected champion for Australian aid (e.g. a local sports player or other well-known figure or an unusual coalition of Australian aid conspirators, such as a multi-faith group or children and elderly people coming together to support Australian aid).

Be positive:
Particularly in news articles or interviews, offer a positive vision and offer solutions for any problem you have identified. Highlighting cooperation of different groups or individuals in addressing a problem is often a positive local angle in a local news story.

Where possible, link to your own experience:
If you have any relevant experience of having lived or worked overseas, volunteered for or supported an overseas global development organisation through your church or school, this can be a powerful way to lend some authority to your opinion.
1. LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

It’s very simple to write a letter to the editor. These can be published on any topic, particularly if they are likely to stir discussion or debate, or relate to local concerns or recent news.

A good letter to the editor should:

- Be as short as possible, ideally 40–100 words and no more than 200 words
- Express the writer’s opinion in first person within the first sentences
- Link to the interests of local people
- Make one point only
- Be interesting, ideally using humour or interesting language

Letters to the editor should be addressed:

“To the editor” or “Dear [name]” if the editor’s name is known
“Re: [name of issue]” or “Re: [title of letter/article and date of issue being responded to]”

Letters to the editor must be signed off with your full name, street address & a contact phone number.
Model letters to the editor for Australian Aid campaign:

Dear Editor,

Last year, Australian Aid partnered with local communities to vaccinate almost 3 million children against disease, provide safe water to more than 2 million people and enrol 1 million children in school. That’s why I’m for Australian aid, and I know a lot of other locals people are too.

Let’s hope the Government [or name of your MP] remembers all the good we can do through Australian aid, because it’s something we can all be proud of.

Jane Citizen
5 Discipleship Lane
Kingsville Qld 4171
(07) 7777 7777

Other examples:

> I know that a lot of local people, community groups, churches and schools in [name of suburb or area] volunteer and donate to support the good work Australian aid contributes to in our region and beyond. They would be glad to hear that last year, through Australian aid, we helped vaccinate almost 3 million children against deadly diseases, provide safe water to more than 2 million people, and enrol 1 million children in school in countries in our region and beyond. I hope we’ll hear more of these good news stories as Australians continue to support an Australian aid program we can be proud of, and a better, fairer world for us all.

> I was really excited to hear about the role Australian Aid plays in partnering with families and communities at Seafort Mum’s Group last week. As a Mum, I support programs to improve child and maternal health and see more kids enrolled in school. It was encouraging to hear about the good work that’s being done through Australian aid to support these promising people overcome obstacles, reach their potential and transform their communities. That’s why I’m for Australian aid, and I think we can all be proud of the good work it does.

2. CONTRIBUTING A NEWS ARTICLE OR
PROMOTING AN EVENT

Local media will very often send a journalist or photographer to community events or to cover interesting events or actions. They are also often willing simply to publish news stories written and submitted by members of the community.

Almost any action you take could be of interest to local media, for example:

- A community group, church or school or group writing letters to the Foreign Minister about why they’re for Australian Aid.
- A community group, church or holding a meeting with a local MP to hand over letters, petitions or “gifts” from aid and development agency gift catalogues.
- A community group, church or school holding an awareness-raising event in the community

A short, simple, media alert can be emailed or faxed to local media before the event and/or a media release about the event can be emailed or faxed (along with any high quality photographs and quotes from local people and prominent guests) after the event. It is always wise to call to follow up on any emails or faxes you send - calling the journalist to ask if they received your media invite or release will make them stop and look at your email.
SAMPLE MEDIA ALERT OR INVITATION

Seaforth Mums for Australian Aid to meet with [Local MP]

Local media are invited to join Seaforth Mums Group at [location, time and date].

The event will be attended by [insert name of local MP/Mayor/candidates as well as any significant people or representatives of school, businesses, community groups who you have invited].

Mums and local community leaders will join together to show their support for Australian Aid in partnering with promising people to overcome obstacles and meet their potential.

[Insert any additional newsworthy information about the event, including any creative or interesting actions that will be undertaken, such as the hand over of a creative petition.]

For media enquiries or to RSVP, please contact:
[insert name and mobile phone number of the event media contact person here].
SAMPLE MEDIA RELEASE

Seaforth Mums for Australian Aid meet with [Local MP]

[X number] people from [Name(s) of groups], met with [MP] last week to show their support for Australian Aid and a better, fairer world for us all.

“As a Mum, I support programs to improve child and maternal health and see more kids enrolled in school,” said local Mum and event organiser, Sally Smith.

“Last year alone, through Australian aid, 3 million children were vaccinated against deadly diseases, 1 million children were enrolled in school and safe water was provided to more than 2 million people,” said Ms. Smith.

Local Member for [Name of Electorate] said he was always happy to meet with local residents to hear their concerns.

“The Seaforth Mums Group is passionate and well informed group of women. It’s always encouraging to hear from Australians who are doing something for others.”

Ms. Smith said the contribution Australian Aid makes to making a better and fairer world for us all is something we can all be proud of.

“That’s why I’m for Australian Aid, and I know a lot of other people in [insert name of local community] feel the same way.”

The meeting took place at [time, date, location] and [insert any other details of the event].

For media inquiries or to arrange an interview or photo opportunity:
[Insert name and mobile phone number of the event media contact person here].
3. **SPEAK UP ON LOCAL AND COMMUNITY RADIO**

Contributing to local or community radio discussion can be a powerful way to influence public opinion. ABC local radio and community radio in particular, very often have long segments within programs that are devoted to airing the opinions of local people on particular topics.

Once you have found the contact details for your local radio station, check the program schedule to see if there are particular programs devoted to a topic that you wish to comment on, or programs or segments that include open discussion of topical issues.

Make sure you plan what you want to say, and ensure that you have no more than 3 main points which you can get across very quickly. For example:

1. I support Australian aid because [your personal reasons).
2. Great work is done through Australian aid in partnering with promising people to overcome obstacles and meet their potential.
3. All of us can all be proud of the work of Australian aid in helping create a better, fairer world.

You may have examples or stories from local communities to back up any of these points.

Call the local station and let the person know that you have called in to talk about “Australian aid” or “Global development.”

If you have any relevant experience, of having lived or worked overseas, volunteered for an global development organisation, supported community development through your church or school, this can be a powerful way to lend some authority to your opinion.

Don’t be afraid to say, “I don’t know about that, but what I do know is...” and go back to your own experience or your main points.

If you have repeated your main points, examples, or points from your experience and an interviewer wants to keep pushing into areas you don’t know about, or don’t wish to respond to, try for a graceful exit like, “Well, I don’t really have any insight into that. But I am grateful for the opportunity to share about why I’m for Australian aid, because I know that do a lot of good in our region and in the world.”
TALK BACK RADIO

If you are a confident speaker, you might like to try your hand at speaking on commercial talk-back radio. However, this is not for the faint-hearted. Talk-back hosts are generally very opinionated, have tight control over what gets said on air, are able to cut off a person’s microphone at any moment, and can even be hostile or abusive if they disagree with the opinion being expressed.

Other talking points for radio

Last year, Australian aid partnered with communities to:
Vaccinate more than 2.7 million boys and girls against deadly diseases
Provide safe water for an additional 2.2 million people
Ensure almost 2 million more people had access to a decent toilet and better hygiene
Enrol an additional 1 million children in school
Provide almost 12 million people caught in a conflict or crisis with life-saving assistance

Australian aid contributes to saving at least 300,000 lives each year and helps around one million children receive education. Australian aid supports communities recover from disasters, provides water and sanitation, and improves agriculture so that communities can become self-sufficient. Australian trains and empowers midwives and community health workers, who are frontline health care providers in poor communities. Australian aid also helps to build capacity and infrastructure so that markets can function better in poor countries. All of this helps make a better, fairer world for us all, which is something we can be proud of.

Australian Aid supports promising people to overcome the obstacles and address the issues that are affecting them, so that they can reach their full potential and transform their communities.