

APPROACHING THE MEDIA

Here are some suggestions for **how you can engage** with the media to publicise your Fellowship and increase your impact. Individual advice is available from our Communications team – email Ben on ben.anstis@wcmt.org.uk.

WHY engage with the media?

Press coverage of your project can deliver **real benefits** to your project. It can raise awareness in your sector or local community, leading to enquiries from interested parties. It can give you credentials (“as seen in The Voice”) which can be used with stakeholders. It can help to spread knowledge about your findings to specific audiences. And developing a relationship with a couple of interested journalists will lead in time to you being asked by them for opinions or articles, which is part of becoming an influencer in your chosen topic.

WHO to aim for

1. The easiest to aim for are your **local media** – local papers or local radio. They are always interested in ‘local person does something interesting’. Their benefit to you will be in reaching local audiences, which might include local organisations, donors, council or businesses.
2. The most interested in your Fellowship project itself will be **media in your professional sector**, which might be trade magazines or websites (eg Farming UK). There might possibly be a relevant radio programme (eg Radio 4’s Farming Today). These will be interested in new ideas for their sector, and this is a good way to influence practice and policy in your field. s.
3. The most ambitious target is **national media**, who will be interested in any topical issues that your Fellowship touches on (eg farming changes after Brexit). These are the most difficult, but there are specialist programmes and newspaper sections that may match your ‘issue’. The benefit of these is that they reach the greatest number of people, and are noticed by higher-level opinion-formers and policy-makers, such as civil servants, industry leaders or MPs.

WHAT to tell them

The key mindset for successful communications is to think – ‘**what will interest this audience?**’ That’s how you hook their interest, and it’s what you always start any piece of comms with. Don’t tell them about yourself at first, tell them about whatever is your ‘hook’.

Sometimes the hook may be a **news moment** – when your report is being published, an event is happening, an exhibition opens, a wider news event will happen. If you can approach them before this news moment, with time for them to include you, they will be more interested than after it.

The trick is to then segue this into what you want to say to them, and it's important to identify for yourself one or two **key messages**, which you can move quickly on to. Identify them before any encounter with the press, and be absolutely sure you get them in. In a live interview, just say 'What I really want to say is...'

HOW to reach them

Email is the preferred route. To find the right person, phone their switchboard and ask for their name/email: if you don't know who it is, ask for 'whoever commissions or reports on X'. Then type a very short email, no more than 3 paragraphs, starting with your hook, then your one or two key messages (one per para), then a para on who you are. Remember – you are a Churchill Fellow, and that is a key credential. Finish with links to your website or blog or twitter, and phone number.

They may or may not reply. If not, that's normal and just means they are too busy to look at your email. Standard protocol is to resend the email perhaps a week later, topped with a polite note saying - 'I wonder whether you had a chance to look at my email below, the news date is X'. You can do this chaser twice before they get fed up.

If they come back to you, always ask **what is their deadline**: it might be '4 weeks off' or '4pm today'. Knowing this helps you to work with their timing. Timing is crucial in journalism: a missed deadline is a dead story.

Be aware that **everything you tell them may be published**. Whatever they say, this is the case. Never tell them something you would mind being published.

WHEN to do it

Top tip is to work far in advance. Allow time for journalists to think about your idea, then for them to research and write it, and for their team to schedule it to appear on the date you want (eg when your report comes out, or your event happens). That process can take 2-3 weeks minimum.

And before that, do bear in mind the 'forward planning' process. Journalists like to line up ideas far ahead. So magazines look at ideas 4-6 months ahead of publication date, national newspapers 4-6 weeks ahead, TV for interviews maybe 4 weeks ahead, national radio maybe 4 weeks ahead, local media 2-3 weeks ahead.

Afterwards

Keep a log of who you talked to, who was interested, crucially who you could go back to with another idea as your work develops. The latter, over time, will become your go-to allies, and then they will start to go to you.

Further advice

Contact Ben Anstis, Communications Officer, on ben.anstis@wcmt.org.uk