

Richard Minter's "Recommended Ten Steps for Changing How News Covers Politics" are shown below. This material is in follow-up of Mr Minter's talk at ICON Lecture Series on March 10, 2015.

1. Adopt a Reporter. Just like the "man-to-man" defense in basketball, task one person in your group to handle each reporter that regularly covers politics in your area. That way each of you will manage each of them. Befriend them if you can. Point out people and points of view missing in their stories. Be helpful. Give them contact info of people that they should talk to. Stay engaged. Don't give up.
2. Write Letters to the Editor. These are among the best-read sections of any newspaper, yet few citizen groups use this valuable tool. Include: your full name and full postal address and phone number (letter editors will contact you to verify that the letter was actually written by you, not some prankster). Also include the full headline and date of the news story that you are commenting on. Be polite, be clear, and be informative. Cite your sources. Write not more than 250 words for letter. That's one page, double-spaced. Check spelling, grammar and capitalization.

Organize letter-writing parties in which every attendee writes one original letter, another checks it, and the group sends it. Don't copy each other's letters.

You will reach more people with letters to the editors at less cost than any other effort.

3. Learn to Write Press Releases. You can't say that the media is ignoring your group if you never notify them about what you're doing. Some tips: Be strictly factual. Reveal how many local members your group has. In one simple sentence, explain why your activity or event is newsworthy (of interest to your neighbors.) Provide exact location, time and contact info of organizer. Add a paragraph about your group: when and where it was formed, why it was formed, how many members and how it is funded.
4. Get a Cable-Access TV Show. Yes people watch those. And it is a great forum for engaging people on local issues. You could even gather a studio audience and take questions from them.
5. Use Facebook. Hundreds of millions of people worldwide read Facebook every day -- including journalists for story ideas.
6. Create Awards for Journalists. Best budget coverage, best government waste expose... Whatever floats your boat. A small cash prize (\$500) and a recognition ceremony will actually encourage writers and editors to produce stories that meet the word criteria.

7. Call into Local Radio. Better, ask for your own show. Sure, it will be on Saturday at midnight. But if you deliver quality content in a compelling way, it will move to a better time slot with a bigger audience.
8. Become a Reporter. Local papers pay poorly and always have openings. Ask to cover local government and become an expert. Be fair. Reporting is actually an interesting job for someone who has steady retirement income.
9. Start a Politician Rating Service. Pick 10 or 20 key votes each year in the county or state legislature and score your local elected leaders. Who gets a “A” for opposing wasteful spending and who gets a “D” for voting to borrow more money to give to corporate contractors. Tell the press and the public what you think the top 20 votes are and how the scores are calculated.
10. Write Thank You Notes. When the media actually covers your issue fairly, write an email or a postcard and say “thank you.” They don’t get those very often and will notice.
11. Learn FOIA. Every state and the federal government have a version of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), which citizens can use to obtain government records—usually for free.

Learn how to file FOIA requests against your local and state government agencies. If you get documents that contain surprising or newsworthy information, share it with one of the reporters that you have built a relationship with.

(Received from Mr Minter, 5/6/15)