



National  
Co-ordinating  
Centre for  
Public Engagement

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# How to... ...work with local radio

# Introduction

If you want to reach out to your local community and talk to new audiences about your research, local radio is a great place to start. Whether you want to be the next local radio star, taking calls from your avid listeners, or just wish to comment on a news item from time to time, this guide provides help and advice on how to take those first steps. Just don't forget to talk to your press office first!

## Getting started

### What can you do with local radio?

There are a number of ways in which you might get involved with local radio:

- Giving an interview, or providing further information and quotes, in response to a press release or report about your research. This is likely to be pre-recorded
- Contributing to a live programme, where you will be interviewed 'on air'. You may even be asked to take questions from callers
- Contributing to a 'news package' – a self-contained feature which has been pre-recorded. This may be an opportunity to go into more depth about your research as it will be longer than the average news report. It may well be recorded 'on location', so they may visit you at your place of work, or interview you at an event with which you are involved
- Providing quotes about a news item or programme, in an area for which you can provide an expert view. This may be a response to someone else's research or to a previously published report with which you were not involved. Don't be afraid to give an expert quote – but make sure you know what you are responding to and how the quote will be used. You may be called into the studio for this, but it is more likely that you will be interviewed over the phone

### Increase your involvement with local radio

Most of the time your involvement in local radio will come in response to a press release which you have sent out, or through a request for an expert (which will probably come through the press office).

If you become more confident in working with local radio, and develop strong contacts with local radio producers, you may wish to initiate your own content (such as a competition, or a programme focused on your research area). However this is not for the fainthearted – radio stations, like any media, have their own agendas and may not be willing to accommodate your ideas. It may also be a case of 'who you know' rather than 'what you know'.

## Working with your press office

**Introduce yourself:** Take some time to get to know your press office. Let them know you are willing to work with local radio, and tell them about your research, your areas of interest and your contact details – this way they are more likely to remember you when a request comes in

**Stay in touch:** Keep them informed of developments in your research - they might identify an opportunity for a press release that you would not have thought of

**Take their advice:** If you want to send out a press release, your press office will be able to help you construct it and target it effectively. They can advise you on a suitable angle to focus on, how to make your research more relevant at a local level and the best time to send out the release. They may even be able to advise you on interview techniques

**Be available:** If you have sent out a press release, encourage your press officers to follow up with their contacts in local radio. Make sure that you are available to take queries when the press release is sent out. Let your press office know when you will be around and how they can reach you (and any other named contacts)

## Conducting radio interviews

There are a number of things to think about when being interviewed for local radio:

**Prepare:** Listen to the radio station, find out what sort of things they usually talk about, and what they expect from you. Who are the target audience?

**Practice:** Rehearse what you want to say in front of a colleague that you trust to give you honest advice. It might be worth recording yourself to listen back. (Make sure that you are speaking slowly and clearly, and enunciating properly)

**Keep it casual:** Keep your tone relaxed and informal. Local radio is usually upbeat in style. Have fun!

**Keep it local:** Remember that local radio has its own agenda - making discussions and news reports relevant to the audience is important. Identify the 'local' angle or impact of your research e.g. if your research has given rise to a breakthrough in cancer studies and your local area is home to an Oncology Unit, you might want to explain how the research will affect the staff or patients in that Unit

**Don't use jargon:** Remember that your audience may not be experts and do not have the advantage of visual elements to help them better understand what you are saying. Keeping your language clear, and jargon free, is all the more important in the case of audio only media

**Tell a story:** Make use of anecdotes and examples to help the listeners to visualise your points and better understand, and relate to, what you are trying to communicate

**Don't waffle:** Stay on topic. If you go off on a tangent it will be difficult for the audience to follow what you are saying. Plan what you want to say in advance. A good tip is to make a note of your main points and make sure you hit each of those markers

**Repeat yourself:** Be aware that your interview is likely to be edited, both for the actual radio programme itself, and for short snippets played to give listeners a 'taster' at different times before and after your interview. Keep reiterating your most important points

**Be sensitive:** Your research may impact people in different ways. Remember to be sensitive to the range of audiences who might be listening

Sometimes the interviewer will come to you. In this case there are a few things you should prepare:

- Who do you need to tell? Find out if you need to perform a risk assessment or inform relevant people within your organisation that they will be coming in to record you
- Find a suitable location for the interview – they will need a quiet room, free from noise distraction
- Make sure you allocate enough time – recording interviews always takes longer than the finished product. The interview will be edited and there is a certain amount of set up time required. Ask them how long they think they will need
- Ask not to be disturbed – tell your colleagues that recording is in process so that they don't burst into the room as you are making a particularly witty comment!
- What other sounds do they need? Radio features are not solely made up of two people talking – they make use of other sound clips to add colour. Identify opportunities for recording additional sound (such as an experiment in the lab). They might wish to interview one of your colleagues or to get some 'vox pops' from students. (Vox pops are spontaneous opinions gathered from passers-by. Vox populi literally translates as 'voice of the people')

## Top tips

### ANNE MCNAUGHT, PRODUCER, BBC SCOTLAND

- Be confident. Radio producers are on a constant - and sometimes slightly frantic - quest for programme ideas. You could be just who they're wanting to hear from today. Producers and researchers generally get stories through press releases, publications, mainstream newspapers, or meeting researchers at conferences. But a personal approach from you via phone or email can be very fruitful – if you follow tip 3
- Do your research. Don't approach a producer or programme until you've got a good idea of the audience they're catering for, and the kind of thing they normally feature. Listen to the programme, and check out their website
- "What's the peg?" This phrase will be going through the producer's mind when considering your story. What it means is, "Why do this now? What's topical about it?" Have a good answer. If your findings are being published next Thursday, that's a great peg. If it keys in with a current news story, that's good too. If it's the 100th anniversary of something related, that's much weaker, but you never know
- Avoid jargon. And that means jargon from the point of view of a non-expert. Glial cells, pulsars, enzymes ... are all examples of words you shouldn't throw in without giving a quick explanation first

- Introduce new concepts simply. You can elaborate from there if you need to. One well-known Radio 4 presenter used to tell interviewees, “Imagine you’re explaining this to an intelligent 9 year old”
- Think: human interest. Many listeners (and even radio producers) believe they’re not interested in some research areas, but everyone is interested in people and what happens to them. Case studies bring complex issues to life. And the idea that “this could affect me and my family” can be powerful
- Use analogies to explain hard concepts. Humour, too, is very welcome, if it’s appropriate. If a biological structure is best likened to a thick rope entirely covered in fried eggs, or a series of microscopic bungee jumps, say so. Now people can visualise it.
- If you’re being interviewed for a radio programme, ask the producer beforehand, “How long have I got?” The difference between 3 minutes and 15 minutes is vast. 3 minutes could mean just a couple of questions, so you need to get the key points in quickly and concisely. (However if it’s 15 minutes – still don’t waffle!)
- Remember, regardless of the story, radio producers need engaging, fluent speakers on air. So rehearse your material thoroughly – or suggest other interviewees with a flair for explaining things. Then, relax and enjoy yourself. That way other people will too

## External resources

- [Social Enterprise Coalition](#), ‘Tips on Working with your Local Media’
- [Tips for Giving Successful Radio Interviews](#)
- [Independent Schools’ Council](#), ‘Working with Local Media’
- [BBC News School Report](#), ‘Radio News Tips’
- [Authors’ Den](#), ‘Giving Radio Interviews’
- [Voluntary Arts network](#), ‘Giving a Radio Interview’



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