

# Creating and Maintaining Good Media Relations

**Y**ou and your institution may already have developed relationships with one or more reporters as part of your repository's outreach efforts. If so, American Archives Month is another opportunity to take advantage of your contacts.

But if you haven't begun the work of establishing relationships with the media, now's the time to get started! The key to successful media attention is establishing rapport with individuals. Those individuals are professionals (like you) who have deadlines and a critical need for good material to publish. Media outlets, whether print or broadcast, generally have four goals: to inform, to advise, to entertain, and to make a profit. To the extent that you can help them achieve one or more of those goals, they'll be interested in telling your story.

Although American Archives Month is designated as a period of celebration and recognition of archives and archivists, the fact is that your organization or repository serves the public – and the media – throughout the year. As you make your media contacts, don't be shy about mentioning the following:

## SPECIAL MESSAGES FOR THE MEDIA

- Historical records are unique, one-of-a-kind sources of information.
- Records contain valuable information that can help put developing stories into context, explain current issues in historical terms, help readers/viewers understand their local communities, demonstrate how a local activity or topic relates to a larger issue, and better inform and entertain subscribers and viewers.
- Archivists, through their understanding of research and their contacts with fellow professionals, can help the media locate information about a variety of topics.
- To the eye of a trained journalist, many archives would reveal a wealth of feature article ideas.
- Historical records programs in the local community often contain information that could help the media “localize” national or statewide trend stories.
- The media maintain their own archives (the “morgue” to veteran journalists) – files of newspaper articles and videotapes that are essential for reporting. Public historical records programs and other types of archival materials are a similar resource.

After you've sent your press release, the next step is to follow up. Good media relations can be the key to obtaining coverage of your story. Initial contacts with the media are made by telephone. Explain why you are calling and offer a description of the upcoming event – dates, times, and locations of activities. Be prepared to answer any questions either in person or via the phone.

Be concise in explaining how your event is a public service and how a story will help inform or entertain the audience. Invite the reporter to tour your repository at his/her convenience or attend an American Archives Month or other event at your facility.

Maintain the relationships that you establish with the media. Let them know how their article or broadcast increased attendance or otherwise contributed to the success of your activity. Send a thank-you note with a photo and caption of the event, and express your appreciation for their help in spreading the word about archives and archivists.

Don't be discouraged if a reporter isn't interested in your story this time – the media can't possibly cover everything. Express thanks for the person's time and go on to your next call. Be sure to mention the resources that you have available to assist in their research or development of story ideas.



**SOCIETY OF  
American  
Archivists**

[www.archivists.org](http://www.archivists.org)

For Tips for Media Interviews, go to  
[www.archivists.org/archivesmonth](http://www.archivists.org/archivesmonth)



## Idea!

You can create a reason to contact the media by paying attention to what is being published or broadcast. For example: A group of Chicago-area archivists noticed that the *Chicago Tribune* had run a series of articles that relied on archival material or told an archives-related story. They used that observation as the basis for a letter to the editor praising the newspaper for its attention to Chicago's history. The letter was published, and even noted that “SAA is headquartered in Chicago's own Loop”!