

**WIC OUTREACH:  
GUIDELINES FOR BUILDING  
MEDIA RELATIONS**



## **WIC Outreach: Guidelines for Building Media Relations**

One way to gain public awareness and support for the WIC Program is through local media – newspapers, radio and television. Working with the media can also help reach potential participants who may not be aware of the important services provided by WIC. Having good relationships with the media can markedly improve the effectiveness of using them for outreach purposes.

Local WIC agencies can facilitate establishing and maintaining positive relations with media personnel by remembering certain guidelines. This publication has been designed to outline several of these guidelines to assist agencies with media interactions. Although the topics in this publication were not written in the format of sequential steps, it might be helpful to consider them roughly in the order as they appear. **Also, it is important to take into account any media rules and regulations specific to the local WIC agency. This includes any social media and internet usage. Be sure to check with the local public affairs officer before utilizing any type of social media.**

As an overview, the guidelines briefly describe the following eight topics.

- Preparing a list of key media personnel
- Characteristics of a newsworthy story
- How and why to prepare a media kit
- How to build media relationships
- How to prepare a fact sheet
- How to write a news release
- Guidance for holding a news conference
- Tips for hosting media visits or interviews

Establish social media tools to help promote the local program. Social media sites include:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- YouTube

Refer to Attachment 3 for more information on incorporating social media into local agency outreach efforts.

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## 1. Preparing a Media List

Compile a list of the following local media. Organize each list by market served. Some publications or stations are appropriate for some types of news, but not all.

- Print Media – newspapers, magazines, “shoppers” and other giveaways, and entertainment magazines
- Broadcast Media – radio and television stations

News staff decides what is newsworthy based on what they believe interests or affects their audiences. In the list, include the names, titles, addresses, and telephone numbers of the following key players. Update the media list every four to six months.

- Editors (from city desk, city/county government, health, lifestyle) decide what goes into newspapers and edit the news.
- Reporters on relevant beats for the city/county government, health, lifestyle (at small papers, these might be the same person) write the stories.
- TV and radio producers decide who goes on shows/programs.
- News directors decide what goes on the air.
- Assignment editors decide what goes in the story. They are supervised by news directors.
- Public service directors review and decide which community groups, programs, or projects to promote. Serve as the publication’s (or station’s) liaison to the community.
- Post news stories to the local WIC Program’s Facebook page or YouTube account.

## 2. What News is Newsworthy?

Before contacting the press to cover a story, there must be something newsworthy to say. Remember that the main objective for media coverage related to outreach is to raise public awareness of WIC and to increase WIC enrollment.

What is newsworthy?

- News that no one has ever said or heard before.
- Timely—yesterday’s news is old news.
- Involves a public figure, celebrity, or well-known organization.
- Affects a large number of people.
- Has a human-interest angle. (Success stories with women and children always score high). Include pictures (with consent) and personal stories.
- Visual (for television and news photography).
- Centers on an event or happening.
- Is “good news” such as lower, statewide anemia rates that can be directly tied to WIC.
- Is a variation of a theme already receiving media attention.
- Accessible to the media—give location, time, and other important information.
- Interesting on what would otherwise be a slow news day.
- Unusual or ironic.

### 3. Preparing a Media Kit

Media kits are the primary tools used to attract the media. They provide media personnel with newsworthy and background information in a clear and concise fashion. Their specific purposes are:

- To start a conversation with reporters, editors, or radio/TV staff when making initial contact or requesting time on a talk show, airing of a PSA, or story coverage.
- To distribute at a media event, such as a press conference or charity drive.

Media kits usually consist of a 9” by 12” two-pocket folder and contain any or all of the following:

- News/press release (see page 10 – Writing a News Release).
- Biographical sketch of the WIC director and/or other key personnel.
- Fact sheet (see page 9 – Preparing a Fact Sheet).
- Photographs.
- Graphs and charts.
- Collateral and miscellaneous items.
- Contact information.

The outreach folder titled, “Outreach Partner Folder” (CNSS #0068) may provide a starting point for the media kit. Add the pertinent elements from the list above that support your story. Remove any inserts from the folder that may distract from the focus of your story.

## 4. Meeting the Local Media

It is a good idea to get to know the local reporters and editors. Learn what they consider newsworthy, who to call when there's a story idea, timing of deadlines, and other useful information. In return, reporters/editors learn about the local WIC agency and that it is a source of good story ideas and information about the WIC Program.

The local WIC agency should establish itself as friendly to the media, while remembering, that a reporter's job is to seek news. Answer their questions accurately and quickly and offer WIC services and expertise as a "background source" to provide information about public health programs, including WIC. Also, offer to direct questions about other public health issues to the appropriate health department personnel. The key to developing good media relationships is *availability* and *credibility*.

Consider the following tips when developing relationships with reporters.

- A reporter is never completely off duty. If something newsworthy is said, it could show up in the news.
- Offer to review any technical material for accuracy prior to publication or airing.
- Don't try to buy reporter's attention with gifts or flattery. Good reporters can't be bought.
- Don't tell reporters how to do their jobs or ask to see a story before it is printed.
- Don't expect reporters to think something is newsworthy just because the local WIC agency does.
- Don't play favorites among reporters by giving one reporter a story before the others. This may alienate too many people and get less coverage overall.

When making **initial contact** with media personnel, consider the following:

- Make an appointment for introductions with the appropriate reporter, editor, or the public service director, although this may be more difficult in a larger town. Mid to late morning is the best time to visit reporters and editors. They are *very* busy in the afternoons.
- Tell the reporter or editor about the WIC program and provide a media kit. Hand-deliver the media kit to the editor/s of the sections in which the information would best be publicized.
- Depending on time available, offer one or two story ideas for consideration.
- Leave business card with the local agency's name, phone number, and email address.

Once initial contact is made with local reporters and editors, it is important to establish an **ongoing relationship**. The best way to do this is through sending out periodic press releases and holding press conferences when there is important news. Be open to visits from the media.

When there is a story would be important to cover, consider the following steps:

- Identify the media personnel who handle the issue and send them a media kit.
- Call media personnel in advance of sending the information or place a follow-up call to make sure they received it. Fax the information immediately if they have not received it.
- After they have had time to review the information, touch base with the reporter or editor to determine their interest in placing a story.
- Do not hesitate to re-send the information if they have not received it or say they have not seen it.
- Refer to the CNSS resources entitled, “Tips for Talking with Reporters” and “Media Talking Points”, both of which can be found on our website within the following document: WIC Outreach Guidelines For Building Media Relations, [www.ncdhhs.gov/newic](http://www.ncdhhs.gov/newic).



## 5. Preparing a Fact Sheet

Fact sheets should be included in media kits. They contain information about the WIC Program in general and about the project or clinic. The details on a fact sheet may depend on the focus of the press release or public service announcement (PSA). See the WIC outreach folder, “Outreach Partner Folder” (CNSS #0068), for information on the program. All fact sheets should contain the following:

- Name, location, hours, and services provided at the local WIC clinic, including any recent changes, agency’s website and social media sites if any.
- Key dates for special events, such as walk-in blitz clinics.
- A brief summary of the WIC Program as well as its mission and successes. (Include Medicaid savings associated with the WIC Program.)
- Information about WIC services (i.e. nutrition education, WIC foods, referral to other health and community resources, and breastfeeding support), the importance of these services for good health, and the means by which participants obtain them.
- Statistics (e.g., number of participants served last month and any recent changes, amount of food dollars spent in the community last year, number of people potentially eligible for the WIC Program, etc.).
- Eligibility requirements for the WIC Program.
- The USDA Nondiscrimination Statement. (See the WIC Program Manual, Chapter 4.)
- Contact information including names, addresses, phone numbers as appropriate, and program’s/health department’s website.

## 6. Writing a News Release

News releases must be.....

- Timely – News is now. Something that happened yesterday, last week, or last month is old news. If a story isn't timely, hold off. Do not develop a reputation for wasting reporters' time.
- Urgent – Use interesting information and attention-grabbing facts to put the story in perspective.
- Brief and focused – Length should be 1 ½ to 2 ½ pages maximum. Hook the assignment editor or reporter quickly, or they may lose interest and be less likely to cover the story. Isolate the message to be shared and make it clear.
- Important to people – Tell the practical importance of the announcement. What impact will the news have on people's lives? Include a description of the WIC Program, eligibility criteria, location of the local agency (including addresses and telephone numbers), USDA Nondiscrimination Statement, and a contact person to handle future questions.
- Authoritative – Quote appropriate experts.
- Easy to understand – Use lay terms. Scrap bureaucratic, scientific, and medical terminology when possible. If such terms must be used, define it simply and concisely. Do not assume that non-health professionals understand terms that are commonplace in the healthcare world.
- Complete – Begin by answering the six basic questions of journalism – Who? What? Where? When? How? and Why? End with contact information.
- Formatted properly – Put the subject of the press release and the contact person's name and telephone number at the top of the first page. If the press release takes more than one page, write "more" on the bottom of each sheet but the last one. For subsequent pages, repeat the contact person's last name, the topic and page number in the upper left corner. Avoid splitting sentences or paragraphs between pages, even if it means leaving excessive empty space. Type #### centered at the end on the last page. Remember to double-space the text (See Appendix A for a sample press release).
- Photo friendly – Suggest photographic possibilities. Remember to obtain consent form/s when arranging a photo session. The media representative (newspaper, magazine, or TV station) will obtain his or her own consent forms for photos he or she takes.

**NOTE: Remember to include the current nondiscrimination statement at the end of all press releases.**

## 7. Holding a News Conference

News conferences follow a certain style. Remember to.....

- Open with a short statement, lasting no more than 30 to 60 seconds. State the reason for the news conference and give the basic story. The speaker should introduce oneself and explain why s/he is there.
- Introduce key speakers. Never have more than three speakers at a press conference.
- Don't be surprised by questions. Reporters are there to ask questions. It's their job. Be sure to allow plenty of time for questions and answers. Always answer honestly and directly. If the reply requires some thought, stop and take the time to think it through. Do not brush aside a reporter's question.
- Listen closely and respond to each question. If the answer is not known, do not speculate. Write down the question and the reporter's phone number and respond as soon as possible on that and other related information.
- Share media kits. Include vital facts or statistics, staff biographies, the text of the opening remarks.

Carefully select the location and time of the press conference. Consider:

- Location: Are the building and room easy to find?
- Timing: Is the time convenient for reporters? Mid to late morning is usually best to give reporters enough time to write their stories by deadline. Try to avoid a schedule conflict with other events.
- Parking: Is there enough?
- Space: Is the room large enough for all the reporters and their equipment?
- Electricity: Is there sufficient power for reporters' tape recorders, lighting, and sound equipment?

## 8. Hosting a Media Visit/Providing Interviews

When a news reporter asks to visit the WIC clinic and/or to interview the WIC Director,....

- Be prepared! Provide supplemental information such as media kits, fact sheets and research reports. Reporters may need the information to more fully understand the program. Prior to any interview, make a list of all possible questions (including negative) the reporter may ask and develop answers carefully. This will result in conveying the information correctly and concisely, helping to avoid damaging misstatements and making for a more effective spokesperson.
- Be accessible and accommodating. Have professional experts and program recipients available for interviews and photos. Meet reporters at the door and show them where to go. Offer information as requested.
- Know media deadlines. News crews have rigid daily deadlines. If they need something, they generally need it quickly. Mid to late morning is usually convenient for a media visit or interview.
- Be concise. When interviewed, speak in brief, focused sentences. Use layman's terms. Stick to the subject - it's not necessary to say everything known, particularly if it involves proprietary or confidential information.
- Admit to bad news, if necessary but emphasize any positive aspects. Point out what has been done to rectify the negative. Use it as an opportunity.
- Never speak "off the record." Don't say anything that shouldn't be broadcast or printed.
- Don't say "no comment." It is perceived as an indication of guilt and/or dishonesty. Tell reporters that the information will be looked into and will get back to them. Ask for their deadline.
- Don't take reporters' insulting questions personally. It could be a tactic to get the speaker to react angrily. Stay calm and continue to make points rationally.
- Don't argue with reporters or lose one's temper. They're only doing their jobs.
- Make sure the exact question being asked is understood. Reporters don't always ask the right questions. Ask them to repeat the question if it's unclear.
- Be honest; it is much better than lying to a reporter. If the answer to a question isn't known, say so. Defer to another source or offer to find out and call with an answer as quickly as possible. Don't let reporters press for an answer
- Above all, RELAX. Advise staff in advance when the media is coming. Ask them to act naturally and to cooperate.

## Television Interviews

If the local health department receives coverage by a television station and they request an interview, remember to...

- Prepare by selecting “must air” points and stressing them in the interview. Write them out and be sure to watch the time so they all get said. Script the interviewer. Although they may not use all of it, it may help get some of the questions asked.
- First impressions are critical – establish kindness and rapport. Smile and thank the interviewer; call the interviewer by name.
- Maintain eye contact with the interviewer – the “crossover” moment between question and answer is critical to credibility on tough questions. To lose contact could indicate evasion, dishonesty, or anxiety.
- Speak up clearly and distinctly. Maintain an even pace to word delivery. Words should not slur together, nor go too fast or too slowly.
- Emphasize important words – Go up the scale to a higher note. This is a good way to underscore major points. Then, take a slight pause to reinforce the importance of what has been said.
- Do not swivel or lean to one side in the chair. Sit fairly erect with a slightly forward tilt. This will help with energy levels and attentiveness.
- Keep answers short, simple, and free of unfamiliar jargon. Get to the conclusion first, and then explain. (e.g., Good nutrition results in having healthier babies with fewer developmental problems. WIC contributes to good nutrition by providing...)
- Work the organization name into answers, but make the interjections logical and unobtrusive (e.g., “We at the Monroe County Health Department believe...”).
- Offer to bring appropriate visual materials that illustrate important points of discussion. Film or videotape clips are especially desirable
- Refer to “Tips for Talking with Reporters” and “Media Talking Points”. These items are available on the Community Nutrition Services Section website at [www.ncdhhs.gov/ncwic](http://www.ncdhhs.gov/ncwic).

## **Radio and Telephone Interviews**

Frequently radio interviews are conducted by telephone. When providing radio interviews, remember to.....

- Ask whether the interview is to be aired live, live-taped, or taped. Turn off any “noise” makers in the office. Cut other telephone calls. Close office door.
- To sound alert, sit up straight in the chair or stand up.
- Don’t shout or whisper. Speak in normal tones over the telephone mouthpiece.
- Tilt mouthpiece slightly away from mouth to avoid “popping” or “hissing.”
- Make sure there is a clear telephone line.
- Watch pauses. “Uh” sounds worse on radio than anywhere else. Silence is better.
- Avoid using numbers unless absolutely necessary. If numbers are needed, use rounded numbers.

## Appendix A: Sample Press Release

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Use agency letterhead

RELEASE: IMMEDIATE (*or date, month, year, and time*)      DATE: (*date distributed*)

Contact: (*Name and telephone number of contact person for more information*)

### **WIC PROGRAM PROVIDES ASSISTANCE FOR ELIGIBLE WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN**

(*CITY*) – WIC or the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children provides supplemental nutritious foods, nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and referrals to health care and community resources to participants. The WIC Program is available at (*insert name and location of local WIC agency*). You may apply for the WIC Program on (*insert days of the week*) from (*insert times of day*).

To be eligible a person must:

- Be a pregnant woman; a breastfeeding woman who has had a baby in the last 12 months; a woman who has had a baby in the last six months; an infant; or a child up to the fifth birthday;
- Reside in North Carolina;
- Meet income eligibility requirements: The gross annual household income cannot exceed 185% of the Federal poverty income guidelines; All Medicaid, Food and Nutrition Services (food stamps) and Work First recipients meet the WIC income eligibility criteria; and
- Have an identified nutritional risk as determined by a health professional.

-MORE-

**WIC Program Provides Assistance**

Contact: *(Name and telephone number of contact person for more information)*

For more information about WIC or to make an appointment please visit *(insert local agency name and location)* or call *(insert local agency phone number)*. Or, visit

[www.ncdhhs.gov/ncwic](http://www.ncdhhs.gov/ncwic).

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.


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## Appendix B: Sample of WIC Advertisements

Digital copies of the WIC advertisements in English and Spanish can be found on the Community Nutrition Services Section website at [www.ncdhhs.gov/newic](http://www.ncdhhs.gov/newic).




**WHAT IS WIC?**  
The Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program is a nutrition program that helps families stay healthy!



**WHAT DOES WIC PROVIDE?**  
WIC provides access to:


- Healthy foods
- Breastfeeding support
- Nutrition education
- Resources for families



**WHO IS WIC FOR?**  
You can participate in WIC if you:

- Are pregnant, a new mom, breastfeeding or have an infant or child under age 5.
- Live in North Carolina.
- Receive Medicaid, Food Stamps, Work First or have a family income less than WIC income guidelines.
- Have a nutritional need determined by the WIC Nutritionist.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:**



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**¿QUÉ ES WIC?**  
El Programa para Mujeres, Bebés y Niños (WIC) es un programa de nutrición que ayuda a las familias a mantenerse saludables.



**¿QUÉ SERVICIOS OFRECE WIC?**  
WIC le ofrece acceso a:

- Alimentos saludables
- Apoyo a la lactancia
- Educación sobre nutrición
- Recursos para las familias



**¿PARA QUIÉN ES WIC?**  
Usted puede participar en WIC si:

- Está embarazada, es madre reciente, amamanta a su bebé o tiene un bebé o un niño menor de 5 años.
- Vive en Carolina del Norte.
- Recibe Medicaid, Cupones de Alimentos, asistencia de Work First o bien, si los ingresos de su hogar son menores a las guías de ingreso de WIC.
- Tiene una necesidad de nutrición determinada por un nutriólogo de WIC.

**PARA MAYORES INFORMES, COMUNÍQUESE A:**



Esta institución es un proveedor que ofrece igualdad de oportunidades.