



Empowering Communities through

Advocacy Amplified – How Nonprofits Can Garner State Legislative Support for Their Causes

- **The Problem:** In pursuing the next great digital marketing channel, nonprofits are overlooking a traditional kind of media that is both a powerful amplifier and available in communities they serve across the country.
- **The Context:** Nonprofits run on funding sources and getting publicity for their mission. By understanding options for working with local broadcast media, nonprofits can leverage the power of TV to expand their outreach and marketing their nonprofit.
- **The Solution:** The author, a longtime TV producer, presents a comprehensive guide for how nonprofits can work with public, educational, or governmental TV channels, known as PEG stations. These channels are designated as community access stations and are often 501(c)(3) organizations themselves.

Nonprofits struggle with two things—raising money and getting the word out about the things the nonprofit does to further its mission. There are lots of articles on things you can do to increase donor participation, but there is less information available about things that can be done to increase media exposure and advance your message.

These days, everyone talks about social media as if it is the solution to every marketing problem. While social media should be part of the marketing plan for every nonprofit, there may be a more traditional kind of media that can be helpful to nonprofits around the country: your local public, educational, or government channel, also known as PEG stations. Some of these channels are also designated as community access stations and are often 501(c)(3) organizations themselves.

These stations also usually look for community-based programming that other, more traditional broadcast media outlets overlook. So, if your nonprofit is doing local work in the community (or really has any kind of community ties), chances are these stations might be interested!

A Brief Guide on How to Work with PEG Stations

Again, public and community access channels are almost always interested in stories that appeal to their viewers in the communities they serve. As a result, they can be very helpful in providing local nonprofits with a platform to promote upcoming events.

However, you need to be thoughtful when you enlist their help. Here are some things you might think about when approaching access channels with programming ideas:

1. Give them event information upfront.

Perhaps your organization is distributing food to families with food insecurity or sponsoring a health clinic to make sure everyone has the latest vaccination. Maybe you're even sponsoring a 5k run to raise money. Regardless of the kind of event, your community access station is probably interested in the details. Many PEG channels run community bulletin boards promoting upcoming events in their service area. Therefore, the first thing you can do is provide the local channel with a graphic containing all the important information about your event—date, time, location, and any additional information on the event. For example, if you are sponsoring an outdoor event, it might also be appropriate to provide information on a rain date.

However, keep in mind that your goal is to make the dissemination of your information as painless as possible. Like many nonprofits, some PEG and community channels operate with small (sometimes all-volunteer) staff. You want to make sure you are not requiring them to do additional work but are instead making their jobs easier. It might be helpful to prepare a PDF for them with information about the event that they can easily add to their community bulletin board.

2. Ask if they are interested in covering your event.

After you have informed them of your event, you might also reach out again to ask them to cover the event itself. You can reach out to the person in charge of programming at your local municipal or access channel and pitch them the story. Keep in mind that they are interested in creating compelling television. This means you should pitch them a *good story* with *interesting visuals*.

If they agree to cover your event, there are some important details you need to address beforehand:

- - Be sure that everyone knows that there will be a camera crew present. If anyone does not want to be photographed, they should let the producer know.
 - Release forms are also important for people who will be featured in the piece. You might want to go so far as to line up “clients” who understand the importance of publicity to the success of the mission and therefore might not mind being photographed. Of course, be sure to get them to sign a release, too.
 - Some events may have to be photographed in such a way as to protect the identity of those who are receiving services.

There are techniques—both photographic, electronic, and otherwise—that can be used to avoid problems and maintain anonymity. For example, you can shoot recipients from behind, only shoot the event with a wide-angle lens, or blur recipient faces if caught on camera. If all else fails, you could also try a different approach. Base the story around those providing the services, not those who are receiving them.

To reiterate, these are all details that you should address well in advance of the event itself. Do not rely on the PEG producer or other workers to solve these problems for you.

If the local station can’t shoot the event but indicate interest in airing a piece on it, you might consider having one of your volunteers or a local high school student produce the video. Most modern cellphones can create acceptable images, and there are also consumer programs available that will allow just about anyone to edit an acceptable video (iMovie, Adobe Premier, Final Cut Pro, or Magix Movie Studio, to name a few).

This solution is less desirable, but it will still generate publicity. Just make sure your local station will accept something from an outside producer before taking on the task yourself. Once the piece is complete, don’t be afraid to ask the station for their input so everyone is happy with what has been produced.

3. Plan your fundraisers carefully.

Galas are quite popular when it comes to raising money. In fact, they are so popular that many stations are bombarded with requests from nonprofits to cover their fundraising events. However, there are some things that you, as the organizer, can do to gain greater notoriety and therefore greater coverage.

One simple way to generate more attention is to build a guest list of people who will be of interest to your community. Invite local politicians, sports figures, the coach of the local football team, and/or other notable community members. Honoring someone of note also helps but is not required.

You can even stage a “red carpet” experience to give your local broadcaster a chance to interview the invited guests. For this, arrange a “step and repeat” location with your logo on a background (most Staples, UPS, or FedEx Office stores can create an inexpensive backdrop). This will give your broadcasters and local press photographers a chance to photograph the local celebrities you have invited. The “red carpet” event also offers your CEO or president a chance to explain the purpose of the event, describe the mission of your organization, and emphasize why the organization deserves support. You may have to give away tickets to your event, but the publicity you gain may well be worth it.

4. Offer a key staff member as an interview subject.

Many local access stations have talk shows that feature interviews with community influencers. These shows are a perfect platform for you to tell your story.

However, there are also some potential pitfalls. If you pitch an interview to a local program director, you should make sure there is something specific you want to promote. Naturally, you always want to promote your overall mission at all times, but you also want to be asked back, so you need to present a particular reason for the interview. Your rationale might involve an upcoming event, the announcement of a grant to finance a special project of community interest, or the successful completion of a program.

Before the interview, be sure to provide the producer or host with plenty of information about whatever it is you want to promote. You should also make sure that the producer/host knows the background of the person to be interviewed. Again, don’t rely on the producer to do the work for you; you want to make their job (and the interview itself) as seamless as possible.

Of course, the interviewee should also be prepped with talking points beforehand. Make sure your interviewee can articulate their passion for the cause they represent as well as direct the interview to reveal that passion.

After the interview, be sure to get a digital copy of the coverage (an MPEG-4 file will work for most purposes). To exploit the increased publicity, post this video on your website, upload it to your YouTube Channel, and/or link it to your social media feed. Then, follow up with an email blast to your supporters letting them know about the production and how it furthers your mission. Be sure to include a link to your YouTube channel in the email.

You can also use the piece as an opportunity to ask for donations, both for your organization and the community access channel. The more you expand your local access channel’s networks, the more likely the producer is to ask you back.

5. Consider producing a Public Service Announcement.

Another thing you may consider is producing a PSA that can air in many different places. Many PEG channels even provide production services (often for a small fee) that will allow you to create these kinds of messages.

You will probably have to do the initial creative work on the script, but community channels often have young people just starting out in the business who can work with you to develop a creative approach to further your message. Hopefully, they will also help you to produce a message that aids your organization while creating a professional-looking spot that they can add to their own demo reel—a win for everyone.

6. Have a point person.

If you decide to get really involved in public access television, you might designate a member of your staff to be the point person for all communications with the station’s staff. This will be helpful to both the broadcaster and your organization since it will direct all questions to the same individual. This will free up people at your

organization to do their jobs without distraction while also making sure you are not wasting the broadcast workers' time.

Remember, your PEG station is a resource!

Think of your local PEG Channel as a resource. Use it sparingly, only when you have a good story to tell. Again, be prepared to pitch an idea to the person in charge of programming and, if the station agrees to produce a show, make it as easy as possible for them.

As an added bonus, many access channels have the ability to take stories that have appeal beyond their markets and distribute them to other channels around the country via a cloud-based server. That means that your organization's message, if the story and the video are compelling, could be picked up in markets around the country, thus gaining further notoriety for your cause. Which is to say that a community access channel's local focus does not prevent it from broadening your network.

As you can see, your local PEG or community channel can be an important tool in your marketing effort. Good luck!

Learn more about marketing your nonprofit, getting publicity for your mission, and creating events that inspire and involve others by attending the [Marketing and Special Events](#) class , part of the Sunshine Certificate in Nonprofit Management.

Source: [Blue Avocado](#), the e-magazine of [Nonprofits Insurance Alliance®](#), offering practical tools and tips for nonprofits, by nonprofits. Nonprofits Insurance Alliance has been a preferred partner of the Florida Association of Nonprofits since 1991, when they were formed by an Act of Congress. They are a group of 501(c)(3) nonprofit, tax-exempt insurers whose purpose is to serve 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit organizations by providing a stable source of reasonably priced liability insurance tailored to the specialized needs of the nonprofit sector. (Find links on FANO.org under Savings.)

<https://blueavocado.org/marketing-and-communications/community-television/>

Author: [Geoff Belinfante](#) has spent his entire professional life producing television shows, commercials, and corporate videos for Fortune 500 companies and professional sports leagues.

Articles on *Blue Avocado* do not provide legal representation or legal advice and should not be used as a substitute for advice or legal counsel. *Blue Avocado* provides space for the nonprofit sector to express new ideas. Views represented in *Blue Avocado* do not necessarily express the opinion of the publication or its publisher.