

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



Revised 2020

WIC Outreach: Guidelines for Building Media Relations

One way to gain public awareness and support for the WIC Program is through your local media – newspapers, radio and television. Working with the media can also help reach potential clients 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.

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

Also, please note that as you read these guidelines, it is important to take into account any media rules and regulations specific to your local WIC agency.

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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. So, in your list, include the names, titles, addresses, and telephone numbers of the following key players. Update your media list every four to six months.

- Editors for city desk, city/county government, health, lifestyle decide what goes into newspapers and edit the news.
- Reporters on relevant beats for 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 publication or station’s liaison to community.

2. What News is Newsworthy?

Before you contact the press to cover a story, you must have something newsworthy to say. Remember your main objective for media coverage related to outreach is to raise public awareness of WIC and to increase WIC enrollment.

What is newsworthy? Something that is.....

- News that no one has ever said or heard before.
- Timely—yesterday’s news is old news.
- That involves a public figure, celebrity, or well-known organization.
- That affects a large number of people.
- With a human-interest angle. (Success stories with women and children always score high). Include pictures (with consent) with personal stories.
- Visual (for television and news photography).
- That centers on an event or happening.
- That is “good news” such as lower, statewide anemia rates that can be directly tied to WIC.
- That 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 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 the following:

- News/press release (see page10 – 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

4. Meeting the Local Media

It is a good idea to get to know the local reporters and editors. You learn what they consider newsworthy, who to call when you have a story idea, timing of deadlines, and other useful information. In return, they learn who you are and that you are a source of good story ideas and information about the WIC Program.

Try to establish yourself as friendly to the media, but remember, a reporter's job is to seek news. Answer their questions accurately and quickly and offer your services 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 your relationships with reporters.

- A reporter is never completely off duty. If you say something newsworthy, 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 you do.
- Don't play favorites among reporters by giving one reporter a story before the others. You may alienate too many people and get less coverage overall.

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

- Make an appointment to introduce yourself to 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 your media kit to the editor/s of the section's in which you wish to publicize your information.

- Depending on time available, offer one to two story ideas for consideration.
- Leave business card with your name, phone number, and email address

Once you have made initial contact 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 you have important news. Be open to visits from the media.

When you have a story you would like covered, consider the following steps:

- Identify the media personnel who handle your issue and send them a media kit.
- Call media personnel in advance of sending your 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, re-contact 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.

5. Preparing a Fact Sheet

Fact sheets should be included in media kits. They contain information about the WIC Program in general and about your project or clinic. The details on a fact sheet may depend on the focus of your press release or PSA. All fact sheets should contain the following:

- Name, location, hours, and services provided at your WIC clinic, including any recent changes, agency 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 civil rights non-discrimination statement.
- Contact information including names, addresses, phone numbers as appropriate, and agency'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. You don't want to get a reputation for wasting reporters' time.
- Urgent – Use interesting information and attention-getting 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 you may lose him or her – and your chances of coverage. Isolate the message you want to share and make it clear.
- Important to people – Tell the practical importance of your announcement. What impact will your 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), civil rights 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 you must use any term, define it simply and concisely. Don't assume that non-health professionals understand terms that are commonplace to you.
- 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 C for a sample press release).
- Photo friendly – Suggest photographic possibilities. Remember to obtain consent form/s when you arrange 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. Say who you are and why you are 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 you don't know the answer, don't 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 you....

- Be prepared! Provide supplemental information such as media kits, fact sheets and research reports. Reporters may need the information to more fully understand your 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 you avoid damaging misstatements and making you 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 you are interviewed, speak in brief, focused sentences. Use layman's terms. Stick to the subject – you need not tell everything you know, particularly if it involves proprietary or confidential information.
- Admit to bad news, if you must, 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 you don't want to see in the news.
- Don't say “no comment.” It is perceived as an indication of guilt and/or dishonesty. Tell them you will get the information and get back to them. Ask for their deadline.
- Don't take reporter's insulting questions personally. It could be a tactic to get you to react angrily. Stay calm and continue to make points rationally.
- Don't argue with reporters or lose your temper. They're only doing their jobs.
- Make sure you understand the exact question being asked. Reporters don't always ask the right questions. Ask them to repeat the question if you're not sure.
- Be honest even it hurts. It is much better than lying to a reporter. They may find out. If

you don't know the answer to a question, 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 you into answers you don't know.

- Above all, RELAX. Advise your staff in advance when the media is coming. Ask them to act naturally and to cooperate.

Television Interviews

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

- Prepare by selecting your “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 your questions asked.
- First impressions are critical – establish your likableness. 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.
- Color 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 you've said.
- Do not swivel or lean to one side in the chair. Sit fairly erect with a slightly forward tilt. This will help your energy level and make you look more attentive.
- Keep your 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 name of your organization into your 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 could illustrate your points. Film or videotape clips are especially desirable.

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 your 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 your mouth to avoid “popping” or “hissing.”
- Make sure you have 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: Tips for Talking with Reporters

Know your subject

No matter how knowledgeable you are about the subject, never go to an interview unprepared. Even if a reporter calls and says he or she is on deadline and "just needs to confirm a fact" or "get a quote," don't be pressured into responding if you don't have the correct information. Ask reporters for their deadline and get back to them after you check your facts, and before their deadline.

Be honest

If you don't know the answer, say so. Offer to find out if you can and call back. If you feel someone else may be more knowledgeable, refer the reporter to that person. Reliable sources are valuable to reporters and you may get more calls in the future. Contact the person whose name you gave to the reporter to provide some advance notice of a potential call.

Be prompt

Always ask, "What is your deadline?" Offer to do some brief research and then do it. Don't feel pressure to answer on the spot. Do respect the media's tight deadlines.

Know your audience

Keep in mind who you are trying to reach and what they will want to know.

Stick to key messages

Identify two or three key messages you want to get across. Stick to those messages. Make your points simple and brief. Keep your answers to the reporter's questions short. Don't wander off with long involved answers.

Talk in "sound bites"

These are short, precise statements, usually 10-20 seconds long, which get your message out clearly and quickly. Practice ahead of time so you will be ready.

Offer background information

Data, graphics, audiovisuals, props and the names of knowledgeable health and education professionals will make your story more attractive. Be prepared to reference your data or statistics.

Return phone calls from reporters

Call reporters back even if it's just to say you can't talk right now but will get back to them later. Don't let a story appear that says you couldn't be reached for comment.

Avoid jargon

Translate technical information into layman's terms. Use short, catchy phrases to make it interesting. Don't use acronyms.

Be gracious

If a reporter covers your program, write a thank-you note

Appendix B: Media Talking Points

- The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) is a Federally-funded nutrition program that provides nutrition education, supplemental foods, breastfeeding promotion and support, and referrals for healthcare and social services. WIC serves low-income pregnant, breastfeeding and postpartum women, infants, and children until the age of 5. WIC has proven effective in preventing and improving nutrition-related health problems within its population.
- Since its beginning in 1974, the WIC Program has earned the reputation of being one of the most successful public health nutrition programs. Numerous studies, reviews and reports demonstrate that the WIC Program is cost effective in protecting or improving the health and nutritional status of low-income women, infants and children.
- The WIC Program is funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). In North Carolina, it is administered by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health, Women's and Children's Health Section, Nutrition Services Branch. WIC services are provided by county health departments, community and rural health centers, and community action agencies.
- The North Carolina WIC Program currently serves over 200,000 participants each month. In *[insert county or agency name]*, we serve approximately *[insert number of participants]* each month.
- To participate, persons must live in North Carolina, have a household income equal to or less than 185% of the U.S. Poverty Income Guidelines and be at nutritional risk. A person receiving Medicaid, Work First Families Assistance (TANF) or assistance from the NC Food and Nutrition Services (Food Stamps) automatically meets the income eligibility requirement. A nutritionist or competent professional authority makes a nutritional risk assessment at no cost to the participant, usually at the local WIC office.
- Nutrition education is a large component of the WIC Program. A trained nutrition professional can work one-on-one with individuals:
 - To teach about the relationship between nutrition, physical activity and good health.
 - To improve eating and physical activity habits as they relate to the participant's nutritional risk.
 - To promote optimal use of the WIC Program's supplemental foods and other nutritious foods.
 - To provide nutrition education appropriate to an individual's age, educational background, household situation, language, cultural and ethnic preferences, and nutritional needs.

- Breastfeeding promotion and support are an integral part of the WIC Program. WIC strives to increase the initiation, duration and exclusivity of breastfeeding among women enrolled in the program. All WIC agencies have trained staff ready to assist mothers in making informed decisions about their infant feeding choice. WIC also educates mothers in the basics of breastfeeding and offers the Breastfeeding Peer Counseling Program to support pregnant and breastfeeding moms.
- Prenatal education is done through educational materials or classes.
- Women can learn about the benefits of breastfeeding, ways to make breastfeeding comfortable, how to tell if the baby is getting enough and fitting breastfeeding into mom's lifestyle.
- WIC participants are encouraged to breastfeed, but it is understood that breastfeeding is not for everyone. WIC provides contract milk-based or soy-based iron-fortified formula for the first year of life. All babies receive infant cereal, and infant fruits and vegetables starting at 6 months of age. Fully breastfed babies receive higher amounts of infant fruits and vegetables as well as infant meats.
- WIC has a shared relationship in the community receiving referrals from healthcare facilities as well as offering referrals for such needs as immunizations, well baby check-ups, child care, and dental care.
- The WIC program and the supplemental food offered promote healthy habits for healthy families.

Appendix C: Sample Press Release

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.

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 nutritionnc.com/mywic (*or insert local agency website*).

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

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Appendix D: Sample of WIC Advertisements

Digital copies of the WIC advertisements in English and Spanish can be found on the Nutrition Services Branch website at <https://www.nutritionnc.com/wic/outreach-resources.htm>.



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:



This institution is an equal opportunity provider.



¿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.