



HOW TO EARN FREE MEDIA ON CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

This memo offers suggestions on how to gain media attention for Constitution Day and the launch of the ACLU's *I am a Constitution Voter* campaign. As a nonpartisan group, the ACLU needs to be extremely careful when seeking media attention during a partisan campaign season. Focusing on Constitution Day this September 17 and the *I am a Constitution Voter* campaign launching this month, the ACLU has an opportunity to insert our issues into the election dialogue and disseminate our message in a *nonpartisan* manner.

There are several ways to gain media attention. Most involve informal invitations asking the press to attend a grassroots activity. Pick up the phone and invite reporters to whatever colorful or provocative event is planned. Remember to tell them this is part of a national movement: People all over the country are organizing for Constitution Day and declaring themselves Constitution Voters. But also remind reporters why your local event is unique and revealing about your area. If you've secured some glimmer of interest, follow up with an email or another phone call to provide further details or background. Even if you are the spokesperson, you might want to guide the media to volunteers you know can illustrate the story about why we need to protect our constitutional rights today.

The options are myriad. Here are several: petition signing, candidate debate watching house parties (keep it nonpartisan!), local high school or college debates on constitutional issues, a Constitution Day scavenger hunt or trivia game involving a local history society or museum, a Constitution Day reenactment—get the local improv group involved, poetry slam or rap for your rights!

Alert television stations of any events you are holding and have someone digitally videotape or photograph what's happening. Family cameras will do. Even if TV stations do not have the resources to cover the event, they might want to get footage of volunteers making signs or doing other prep work for the event, or they might use your video or photographs.

Another great way to disseminate the ACLU's message is to make the media aware of our online campaign. You can demonstrate the website on a big screen at an event, or separately arrange for a member of the press to watch one of your volunteers using it and the "tell a friend" function. The hook for the reporter is to see and experience virtual or online campaigning. Ask those who attend the event to let you know how they learned of it. The results could be part of the story as well.

Good visuals and sounds result in great earned media. For a petition signing event you can print up a copy of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Then create a petition with simple language stating that on Constitution Day the undersigned are endorsing the Constitution. Try to have at least six volunteers on hand and be sure to go to a high traffic area such as a mall, busy park or grocery store. Play or perform patriotic or other popular music to draw attention to yourselves. Have two volunteers hold hand painted signs and have the other four volunteers collect signatures and sign-ups. You can take pictures of petitioners or ask them to take pictures of themselves and post them online.

The above are some general suggestions for garnering media coverage for Constitution Day and similar events. The effectiveness of these tactics will somewhat vary based on your media market. If you would like to discuss media strategies specifically for your affiliate, please do not hesitate to contact Liz Rose at 202.675.2303.