



# HITTING THE ROAD: A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO MEDIA TOURS



Promoting awareness of career and technical education (CTE) is a critical component to CTE advocacy. There are many ways to raise awareness of CTE: hosting a school visit, contacting the media with success stories from CTE programs, or informing the public about how they can get more involved with their local CTE programs. A **media tour**, however, combines all of these approaches into one strong push.

A media tour is a series of school visits and editorial board meetings held with members of the media. The purpose of the media tour is to educate reporters about CTE, which should result in improvement in reporting trends among media outlets visited. Ultimately, the improved reporting will lead to greater awareness and understanding of CTE within the general public. Media tours are relatively brief (less than a week), and are focused on a specific geographic area, sometimes including a central theme.

ACTE's national office strives to be a resource for State affiliates by helping them coordinate their own public awareness efforts, including media tours. The presence of a national representative can be helpful in providing a national perspective to pique a reporter's interest but having the local perspective and information is critical. ACTE can partner with host organizations to maximize the impact of the media tour in planning efforts, and can travel to participate in the tour at cost to the state.

Executing a media tour requires a significant amount of advance planning to maximize the likelihood of success. When planning a media tour, keep the following in mind:

1. Identify the dates you are interested in hosting the tour and the targeted area. When selecting these dates, bear in mind any impediments to reporter or stakeholder attendance, including:
  - Many news outlets are busy with editorial team meetings on Mondays and are busy on Fridays, so it can be difficult to garner reporter presence at events on these days.
  - Any federal holiday will reduce a reporter's likelihood of being in the office, as well as major

events such as Election Day or the State of the Union Address. Try to avoid these conflicts to minimize your competition for coverage in addition to any local community conflicts.

- If you plan to invite policymakers, remember that you will need to plan significantly in advance and work around the legislative calendar and other public commitments.
2. If you plan to invite a representative from ACTE's national headquarters, be sure to provide advance notice and bear in mind other major ACTE events, such as CareerTech VISION or the National Policy Seminar. While ACTE strives to be a resource to its members at all times, staff commitments during these periods will prevent their participation.
  3. Work with others in your state, ACTE staff and other CTE leaders in your community to identify the target programs that will be included in the tour. Tour sites should be within reasonable distance of one another and should demonstrate best practices and innovation that are representative of excellence in CTE.
    - As you are planning, consider a variety of programs, topics and settings. Develop a connecting element for programs across the tour (e.g. high-quality CTE programs, CTE programs that emphasize STEM skills, etc.) Represent that theme in different ways. For example, be sure to include both rural and urban settings for tour stops. This will ensure that you are not missing an opportunity to reach a reporter who is interested in a specific type of program.
    - As you plan for tour stops, be sure to consider the distance between meetings and the travel time required. You may need to find accommodations along the way.
  4. Once you have planned the tour locations and dates, map out a comprehensive agenda for the tour including the general discussion topics, time, and meeting location for each tour stop. Circulate this information with all others

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participating in or hosting the tour and ensure that they have obtained all necessary approvals within their school's administration and are prepared to conduct their tour stop in the timeframe allotted.

- If you plan to invite any local, state or national policymakers, it may be helpful to refer to ACTE's guide *Hosting School Visits for Policymakers* (<http://actete.ch/1OxOCUf>) in planning the visit. This will assist you in meeting the needs of these special attendees and presenting the most effective message possible.
  - Tours should include stops in any relevant CTE classrooms, as well as the participation of relevant spokespersons for the school district or administration. It may also be helpful to request that students in these classrooms have a planned project or demonstration to display during the tour.
  - In addition, remember that members of the media often bring photographers with them or video/audio recording equipment for use in their reporting. It is important to ensure that video and photo release forms are on file and up-to-date for all individuals that will be present. If the planned tour stop has individuals under the age of 18 present, their parent or legal guardian will need to have completed this form. Typically this form is completed by the school, however, the tour organizer should verify that all forms are on file and up-to-date.
5. Establish your targeted media list. Use connections within your community and resources like ACTE's *Targeting the Media* publication (<http://actete.ch/1Hpau2j>) to establish a broad list of publications that you are interested in inviting to participate in your tour. Spend time researching these publications to identify each reporter's preferred method of communication. Usually this preferred communication is by phone, fax or email. It is important to respect reporter preferences and adhere to their guidelines. In addition, identify any specific reporters that have demonstrated an interest in CTE through their previous coverage or that are active on the education beat.
- ACTE staff can assist you in developing your target media list and identifying reporters' preferred communication method. ACTE can take an active role in leading these efforts if they are partnering with you or your state for the media tour.
  - Be careful to only include pertinent publications on your targeted media list! Newsrooms work hard to ensure that they are clear about their organization's mission and the readers they serve. They are often put off by communications that are outside of the scope of their publication.
6. Write a media advisory for distribution to your targeted reporters to distribute about two weeks ahead of your tour's start date. Structure the advisory around the tour overall rather than any single visit. Be sure to include the complete agenda in the advisory so reporters can select the stop that is most conducive to their story. If ACTE staff are included in the tour, be sure to request their assistance in developing the advisory and don't forget about the Sample Media Advisory (<http://actete.ch/1J0LaxO>) that is available on the ACTE website to guide your efforts!
- Send the advisory to your targeted reporters about a week before the tour begins. It is best to send these by 11:00 a.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday. As always, be cognizant of other major news events or other challenges to getting a reporter's attention.
  - Two days after you send your media advisory, follow up by phone with outlets that you are especially interested in visiting. Confirm that the outlet received it and check to see if there are any questions that they might have.
  - As you receive responses to your advisory be sure to log them according to the tour stop so you can anticipate reporters at that site. Share those RSVP's with the point of contact at the site as well so they know what to expect.
  - Send a final follow-up media advisory the day prior to the event. Be sure that you have removed any individuals from your distribution list who have already confirmed or declined so you aren't spamming them!
7. Conduct the tour and be sure to take careful notes on everything that you see, whether or not reporters are able to join.
- Pictures can also be helpful, but be sure that they reflect all classroom safety and behavior standards. For example, all students are properly wearing safety goggles in an automotive lab or all students have their hair tied back in culinary arts.
  - Be sure to obtain a quote from CTE representatives at each site. Include their full name and title. This is particularly important if reporters are not able to join you.
  - If reporters do join you, be sure to provide them with a national and statewide context for the visit so

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they understand the value of CTE in your area and across the country. Remember to follow all regular guidelines for interacting with reporters, including remaining calm and professional.

- In addition, request a copy of the story or video footage from all reporters. Provide your contact information and remember that this may be different from that on your business card if you are on the road.
8. Send follow up materials (including press releases) to reporters in the distribution areas of any sites that did not have a media presence. While reporters may not have been able to join you for the visit itself, a press release could provide enough information to pique their interest and produce a story after the fact.
    - Remember to send a thank you note to any reporters that did join you as well!
  9. Once the tour ends, tell others about it! If an ACTE staff member joined you for the tour, remember that they may be a resource to you in developing a follow up plan, including sharing write-ups of the visit on the ACTE website or arranging post-event interviews.
  10. Track the coverage of publications that did join you for the tour to see if you had a long-term effect on their reporting or if their article received any reader feedback. The goal of the media tour isn't just that you'll produce coverage during the event, but that you'll educate the reporter and their readers and spur greater awareness of CTE!
    - Don't forget to share your stories and media placements with ACTE's national office. Send links, clips and video to Sean Lynch (slynch@acteonline.org) or any staff member so we can share with the entire association!



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