



Recruiting Members: Newsroom Outreach

Mass mailings, postal or electronic, don't reach journalists who might make great members of your chapter the way a personal invitation does. Of course, the personal touch, while effective, is also time-consuming. This newsroom outreach program combines the effectiveness of the personal approach with the timesaving benefits of mass marketing. Recruit two or three board members to make a quick but informative personal visit to local newsrooms to let staffers know about SPJ, its mission and programs and why it's a worthy organization to join.

Target Newsrooms

- ▶ Make a list of local newsrooms you'd like to visit, taking into account those who are most likely to be interested in SPJ. Consider weekly newsrooms, smaller dailies and online organizations in addition to metropolitan dailies and broadcast stations.

Be Prepared

- ▶ You'll want to leave behind handouts with plenty of information. Contact headquarters at (317) 927-8000 to have free membership brochures, Code of Ethics cards, membership applications and information sheets on programming and training to leave behind. Create a handout for your local chapter that includes complete contact information, next program event and next board meeting date. Consider printing a wallet-size card that summarizes your state's laws regarding public records and open meetings and what journalists should do if they're denied access. If your state has a free legal hotline for journalists to call for help in such situations, include that. Make sure your chapter's contact information — Web site or phone number — is also on the card.

Set Up the Visit

- ▶ Call an editor or news director to set up a convenient time and ask him or her to convene as many staffers as he or she can for a brief visit. Explain that you are visiting newsrooms in the area and that you plan to take no more than 30 minutes; 20 minutes of presentation and 10 minutes for questions. Free food is always a draw. If you have the budget for it, consider bringing in lunch or coffee, depending on the time of visit.
- ▶ Explain to the news manager that SPJ seeks more members in order to better accomplish three important things individual news outlets usually can't do as well:
 - We give a stronger voice to journalists' concerns about access to government through public records and open meetings, through advocacy in courts, through our Legal Defense Fund, through filing court briefs, and by lobbying in the state legislature and in Congress for such protections as a federal shield law.
 - We provide local journalists with free or affordable access to programs on topical issues of interest from newsgathering tools to ethics to freedom of information to diversity.
 - We honor excellence in journalism through local, regional and national awards programs. If the newsroom regularly supports (and wins) SPJ awards, thank them for supporting the awards program and explain that you'd also like to have their support as members.
- ▶ Very important: Make sure the manager enthusiastically promotes this visit — emphasizing that it will take no more than 30 minutes — so that your appearance doesn't take people by surprise and your attendance suffers as a result. You may wish to design a flier he or she can copy and/post no more than a week before the visit.

Make the Visit

- ▶ Arrive about 10 minutes early to give you time to set up your food and drinks and your handouts.
- ▶ Have plenty of your own business cards ready to give out.
- ▶ Dress appropriately for a typical workday.
- ▶ Start promptly by thanking those who came and saying up front that because you respect their time you will be leaving in 30 minutes.
- ▶ Give away a prize. The national Web site (www.spj.org) has a link to some SPJ merchandise you could buy for this purpose. Ask everybody to put his or her business cards into a hat and pick one to determine the winner. Keep those business cards for later (see Follow Up below).
- ▶ Start with a personal story of what led you to join SPJ and what it's meant to you and your career. People relate to personal accounts better than descriptions; if they can recognize themselves in the tales you tell, the more likely they will see themselves as members.
- ▶ Briefly summarize SPJ's services, emphasizing what your local chapter has been doing.
- ▶ Finish by sharing a few successes. Refer to the latest SPJ Working for You newsletter to get the most recent activities in the courtroom, in lobbying, in helping improve the quality of journalism nationally and locally.
- ▶ Your last words should tell your listeners that even if they don't have the time to be as active in SPJ as you are, that simply by joining and contributing to the mission with their dues, they'll receive the satisfaction of knowing that there are people out there constantly acting on their behalf. Thank everyone again, leaving behind that contact info, clean up and go.

Questions about member roster, applications or recruitment materials?

**Membership Coordinator
(317) 927-8000, ext. 203
membership@spj.org**

Follow Up

- ▶ Send an e-mail message to everyone whose business card you picked up for that prize giveaway, thanking him or her for giving up their time to meet you and letting them know that you will gladly answer any questions, facilitate further introductions or provide more materials. And make sure that whether they join or not, your chapter is there to serve their needs, listen to their concerns and their suggestions for chapter services and programs.
- ▶ Thank the newsroom manager with a hand-written thank-you note you send by postal mail. The bosses are also targets for membership and, in fact, if the boss joins, it's probably more likely that staff members might join as well.
- ▶ Offer to that newsroom manager to return and conduct a free, 45-minute quick course on getting access to public records and open meetings to his or her newest staff members in exchange for him or her paying for two national-and-local memberships. That way, he or she can identify the most likely people on the staff to get the most out of an SPJ membership.

Final Thoughts

- ▶ This is a devotion of your time as a chapter leader as well as of the time of those you visit. So plan to do no more of these visits than one per month. While the primary goal is to recruit members, you will also raise SPJ's local profile by simply letting it be known that SPJ is there in your community. You may also hear some great ideas from rank-and-file journalists about what's affecting their ability to do their jobs and other media issues you might be able to translate into later advocacy or a program topic.
- ▶ You're investing your time and some chapter funds for the food and drinks, but engaging in newsroom outreach should pay dividends to your chapter leaders as well as to the local journalists you serve.