



Advocacy Toolkit for Women in Politics

6 Be Media Savvy

“Having your own profile prepared can ensure that the media gets the basic facts right and has some pointers on the areas of your life that you believe are important for the public to know.”

There are some simple steps that women politicians can take to build their media profile and to begin to get their voices and views heard. These include the following:

Prepare your profile

When entering the political arena, women politicians should prepare a profile which

can be given to the media as background material. This can be prepared with the help of a public relations firm, or a local journalist, and can be used in campaigning or other appropriate forums to help people know who you are and what you have done that prepares you for the field of leadership and public service.

The media will of course begin

to write their own human interest stories and profiles about you as your recognition in the public space grows. But having your own profile prepared can ensure too that the media gets the basic facts right and has some pointers on the areas of your life that you believe are important for the public to know.

Have photos on file

The print media always needs photographs to accompany their stories because photographs tell their own story. So it's a good idea to have some photos taken professionally and keep these on file so that you can offer photos at short notice to accompany your profile or for other media coverage. The photo should make a good first impression.

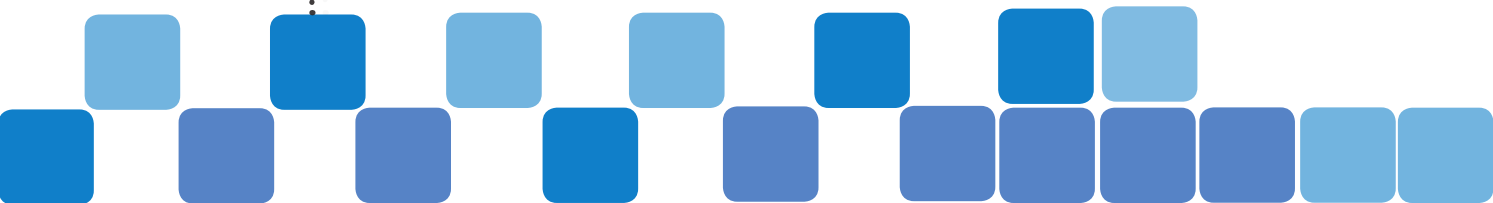
It should be eye-catching and illustrative of your personal brand. If you can offer your own photo it will avoid the media digging through the archives and using an unflattering or out of date picture or quickly grabbing a shot when you are not prepared.

Focus on getting a few good head and shoulders portraits and make sure your pictures are appropriate for the media by:

- keeping colours simple – nothing too bright or too dark. Don't wear plaids, florals, checks, stripes or polka dots.
- Keeping accessories simple. No big jewelry, flashy scarves, or pocket handkerchiefs. Wear eyeglasses only if necessary.
- Sit tall.

Tips for Interviews

1. Know your message and keep going back to it. Use every opportunity to get your message in clearly without using jargon.
2. Never say “no comment”. This invites suspicion and leads reporters to wonder if you are hiding something. Rather, you can say,
 - a. This is what I know and I will be glad to tell you;
 - b. I don't know but I can help you to find out;
 - c. I cannot answer that question because the information is confidential (for example the name of a patient and his or her condition).
3. Don't argue with reporters. Try to create a civil environment for the interview.
4. Anticipate questions and practice answers. You should almost never be caught off guard or surprised.
5. If you are going on television, watch the programme ahead of time to see the reporter's interview style (aggressive, leading, open) and even to know how the furniture is positioned and the colour scheme.
6. If you are asked more than one question in one, answer the one you like and ignore the rest. If the reporter/presenter really wants to know he or she will ask again.
7. What comes across on television most is your body language (55%), the tone of your voice (47%) and your choice of words (7% source – Susan Peterson Productions) so make sure your body language and tone of voice are confident but not in an aggressive or arrogant way and that you are well prepared and can articulate your issue in a knowledgeable manner.



“Ensure you have the latest data and information as well as views from women and men in your constituency, so that you can talk facts, figures and impact”

- The same tips apply to your appearance for television interviews.
- It is advisable to go to a professional studio photographer who will be able to get the right light quality that is most flattering to you, the background, camera angles and who can also advise you on what to wear and your make up.

Think News

- Remember, the media is always looking for news and a good story. “News” is what is new, but this includes more than just what is happening now. What is new also can be a new interpretation of an event or issue.

Adapted from Women in the news: Strengthening the Voice and Visibility of Women in the African media's Coverage of Elections, Politics and Governance, IPS, 2008

Build relationships

Go and look for the journalists/editors to give them story ideas and information. Establish a relationship. Don't just go once, but twice, three times, as often as necessary to form a relationship with journalists and editors.

Plan for the media

It is important to have one person who works with you handle media relations. This person keeps an up-to-date list of the key players in the media, especially senior editorial management; a list of journalists, talk show, current affairs and radio programme hosts and producers; and who helps to prepare media mate-

rials, as well as to prepare you for interviews with the media.

Prepare to talk to the media
Conducting mock interviews with staff, colleagues and/or friends is one way to build up confidence for engaging with the media on topics and issues.

Keep press cuttings and files on the topical issues in your society and ensure that you have the latest data and information, as well as the views from women and men in your constituency, so that you can talk facts, talk figures and talk impact.