

Media Relations Guide

How to Generate Public Awareness about the ACVO/Epicur National Service Animal Eye Exam

Thank you for your help! Without the help of our members, we would not be able to provide free sight-saving eye exams to thousands of service animals. During our 2023 event, more than 5,250 service animals were helped. We want the program to continue to grow and educate as many members of the public as possible about the importance of eye exams.

With that in mind, we have created this how-to guide to help you quickly and easily spread the word to the public about the National Service Animal Eye Exam Event and why it is important. This guide is designed to supplement ACVO's national efforts by allowing you to reach out to your local media through public relations effectively. Working with the reporters, editors, and broadcast producers in your city can have a powerful impact on our efforts. By developing relationships with them, you will be able to reach more people without incurring extra costs associated with advertising or other outreach efforts while also helping us meet our goal of providing as many free sight-saving eye exams as possible this year.

How does public relations work?

Public relations is a little different from other forms of marketing you may have used in the past; you do not pay for the time or space on television, online or in newspapers, as you do with advertising. You “earn” the space by providing information of value to the outlet's readers, listeners, or viewers.

Unlike paid advertising, you cannot dictate how, when or even if a reporter will use your news, but through careful planning and an appreciation for the reporter's objectives, you can deliver a message that is more credible than the message you control in advertising. Thus, public relations is highly cost-effective, with the only main investment being your time.

Don't sweat the small stuff

We know you have a lot of other things to do, don't worry if you cannot send out materials exactly the way we've outlined in the following timetable and throughout the how-to guide. Do your best, and contact us if you have any questions. Utilizing these materials, distributing them to the media, and making follow-up calls will increase your chances of success.

The ACVO/Epicur Pharma National Service Animal Eye Exam Event is a great “feel good” story that can build awareness about your practice and ACVO, as well as highlight the importance of Service Animals to your community. The media loves national stories with a local angle, especially when pets are involved. Working with the media can generate great results when you follow the guidelines outlined below.

Throughout this guide, we will cover the following topics:

1. Finding the right media contacts
2. Pitching the media
3. Preparing for an interview
4. Tips for interviewing
5. Message points

FINDING THE RIGHT MEDIA CONTACTS

To start spreading the word about the ACVO/Epicur National Service Animal Eye Exam Event, you will need to build a media list; plan on starting this process as soon as you receive this guide. If you have personal contacts in the media, find out ahead of time if they are interested in this kind of story. If your contacts tell you they are not the right reporter or editor, they will usually be kind enough to refer you to the right person. NOTE: Never contact an advertising department about a story idea. If you cannot find contact information for specific individuals, simply contact the outlet’s main newsroom/news desk.

Build and enhance your media list the same way you build your professional network. After you identify the TV stations, radio stations, newspapers, magazines and local blogs/websites you would like to have cover your story, do a little research to find out who the best person is to contact at each outlet. When you reach out, you can reference that you read some of their past stories and thought they might be interested in your news. If you do not have time to research each outlet’s/reporter’s past stories, you can contact the outlet’s main newsroom and ask for the correct person to approach regarding a pet and human interest-related story. Make it a point to get the correct name, address, e-mail address, and phone number.

Please also note that contacts have different titles at radio stations, television stations, and newspapers. Here are the people you should reach out to:

- **TV:** News assignment editors; producers of the stations’ morning, midday and/or talk shows; community calendar editors or reporters. You should also contact the main newsroom/news desk.

- **Radio:** News directors; producers of the stations’ morning, midday and/or talk shows. Be cautious and do not approach “shock jock” stations that may not tastefully handle your news.
- **Print:** Reporters or editors that cover pets, lifestyle, features, human interest, health or community news; photo desk editors; calendar/event editors or reporters. Please note that depending on the size of an outlet, they may not have someone covering each of these topics. At smaller newspapers, ask for the managing editor.

Example of a Media List

Media Outlet Name	Contact Name	Contact Title	Contact Email	Contact Phone	Notes

PITCHING THE MEDIA

Once you have created your media list, it is time to email the event information, as well as follow up over the phone with your contacts to encourage coverage of the event. The news release, coupled with follow-up calls, has been designed to break through the clutter reporters and editors receive daily.

Here are a few tips for pitching your story to the media:

- Fill in the blanks and customize the news release we provide. You will find this release on the website at www.ACVOEyeExam.org. Each item is marked for customization. Please be sure to fill in every blank with your localized information.
- Draft a short personalized “pitch” to accompany the press release when you email it to your contacts. Address each contact by name and concisely state the event and why

they should cover it. Once you have e-mailed information to each of your contacts, wait for one to two business days before making follow-up phone calls to each contact.

- Always think about what the media outlet wants when showcasing your story. For example, TV news programs (unlike morning and midday talk shows) will want visual content, such as Service Animals receiving an eye exam. They will likely want to send a videographer to your practice to get the footage. TV morning and midday talk shows, however, might be interested in having a doctor do an in-studio interview (and possibly bring a dog to demo the eye exam). Radio stations respond best to one-on-one interviews (remember, if TV is visual, then radio is all about sound). Print contacts usually ask for the most detail and like to look at the history and benefits of the National Service Animal Eye Exam Event (after all, they have more time with their audience). They'll typically request an interview by phone and may also want to send a photo editor to your practice to capture their images.
- If the media is interested in covering the story, be sure the participating ophthalmologist is ready, and be as helpful to the media as possible. We encourage the clinics to designate their participating ophthalmologist as the media spokesperson whenever possible. Before interviews, the doctor should review the message points provided in this guide.
- Make sure you meet the media outlet's deadlines. While your media contacts should already have the news release or media alert, they may require additional information or want to use you as a resource in a related ACVO/Epicur Pharma National Service Animal Eye Exam Event story. Always return phone calls and email requests for information as soon as possible (within 24 hours). Most outlets will schedule space/interviews quickly and/or have specific closing dates and deadlines that cannot be extended, so responding promptly is imperative.

PREPARING FOR AN INTERVIEW

If someone from the media is interested in doing a story about the ACVO/Epicur Pharma National Service Animal Eye Exam Event, he or she may want to do an interview in person or over the phone. Interviews are always a great chance to share your messages with the public and call them to action, so being prepared is critical.

Here are a few tips to help you prepare for interviews:

- Understand the reporter’s perspective. They are on tight deadlines and generally avoid “small talk” and/or may fire their questions at you rapidly.
- Know your facts. The media is there to report the “facts,” so come to the interview prepared with specific figures and examples in case the reporter asks for them.
- Plan what you want to say if the reporter asks, “Is there anything else you’d like to say?” During the interview, recap each of your message points as a response.
- Prepare for possible interviews by rehearsing with a friend or coworker — this may sound silly, but it helps you develop clear, concise messages that will benefit your National Service Animal Eye Exam Event efforts. If no one is available to rehearse with you, practice by talking into a mirror. Body language is important for television, as people will remember how they felt about you more than they will remember what you said.
- Pace yourself. If the interview is for a TV or radio station, ask if the interview will be live or taped. Live interviews normally last only two or three minutes, and when you are live, there is no opportunity for editing. A taped interview might last five or 10 minutes because the reporter will have time to edit the story to a shorter length before it airs.
- Be prepared for scope expansion. While this is difficult to plan for, questions or topics outside the original scope of the interview may arise. If you are asked a question you cannot answer during the interview, just tell the reporter; do not respond with hypotheticals or scenarios. You can also utilize the bridge by saying “I don’t know about that, but what I do know is...”
- Remember, the media love feel-good, interactive stories. If possible, identify a service animal that is participating in the event. This offers a compelling human-interest story with many visuals — photographers and reporters love those. NOTE: Ensure you receive the appropriate permission before speaking about a client/patient to the media.

A note about television:

Television producers like to use on-screen graphics. You might provide the following text to use: For more information about the ACVO/Epicur Pharma National Service Animal Eye Exam Event and other educational opportunities, visit www.ACVOEyeExam.org.

TIPS FOR INTERVIEWING

- Do not overlap the interviewer's question; begin your answer when he or she is finished.
- Pay attention to your body language. Keep your hands free, open, and animated. Gesture as you usually would. Make sure to smile while you talk, making you sound more enthusiastic.
- Speak slowly and be brief. Do not get nervous and feel the need to "fill the silence." Short answers are better than long ones. Speak in complete sentences and stop talking when you are done making your point.
- Know what you want to communicate and do not be afraid to repeat yourself. Live by your message points.
- Think like a journalist: speak in headlines and follow up with supporting information and details.
- Avoid using jargon and acronyms. Speak as simply as possible and remember that the public processes information at a fifth-grade level. Also avoid using humor, which often backfires and can make you seem nervous.
- There is no such thing as "off the record." Never mention anything to a reporter you would not want to see in print. Similarly, if you fear the reporter is trying to put a negative spin on the story, never respond with "no comment." Instead, explain what you do or do not know, then let the reporter know you will follow up with him/her with any additional information.
- Television is an intimate medium. Speak in personal, anecdotal terms. Use analogies to illustrate your point. Do not be afraid to tell "your story."
- Mention the ACVO/Epicur Pharma National Service Animal Eye Exam Event's website (www.ACVOEyeExam.org). NOTE: This is important because people MUST first register on the website before they contact a participating hospital.

MESSAGE POINTS

When is the 15th Anniversary ACVO/Epicur Pharma National Service Animal Eye Exam Event?

Registration for the event occurs April 1st-30th and exams occur during May.

What is the ACVO/Epicur Pharma National Service Animal Eye Exam Event?

An annual event during which more than 260 board-certified veterinary ophthalmologists from across the U.S., Canada, Puerto Rico, Hong Kong, and Puerto Rico provide free sight-saving eye exams to thousands of service animals. Since its inception in 2008, more than 81,000 Service Animals have received free eye screening exams.

What animals qualify for free exams?

To qualify, Service Animals must be “active working animals” that were certified by a formal training program or organization or are currently enrolled in a formal training program. The certifying organization could be national, regional or local. Further qualification information is located at www.ACVOEyeExam.org.

How do owners register for ACVO/Epicur Pharma National Service Animal Eye Exam Event?

Owners must first register online at www.ACVOEyeExam.org. After registering online, they can review a list of participating board-certified veterinary ophthalmologists and call to make an appointment for the free eye screening exam.

Who sponsors the National Service Animal Eye Exam Event?

Epicur Pharma, a division of Stokes Healthcare, has generously been the 'name-sake' sponsor of this event since 2014 and has agreed to continue to sponsor this event through 2024.

What is ACVO?

The American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists® (ACVO®) is an approved veterinary specialty organization of the American Board of Veterinary Specialties and is recognized by the American Veterinary Medical Association. Its mission is “to advance the quality of veterinary medicine through certification of veterinarians who demonstrate excellence as specialists in veterinary ophthalmology.” To become board certified, a candidate must successfully complete a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree, a one-year internship, a three-year ACVO® approved residency and pass a series of credentials and examinations. For more information, please visit www.ACVO.org.
