# What makes a good news story?

**Real People**   Look for articulate and positive people who are willing to be interviewed and photographed for newspaper and TV stories.
People who have compelling personal stories to tell are a must for media "pitches" – the brief, one-screen emails that try to entice reporters into writing about or providing coverage of an organization, cause or event. For example, to pitch a story on a program that helps homeless people find jobs, we would want to find one or two participants who would be willing to relate how the program helped them find shelter and work. Note that "real" people usually are those affected or impacted by something, not the bureaucrat, supervisor or staff person in charge of delivering the service (although they are needed to help explain and put things in context).

**Local Ties**   Newspapers and TV look for ways to tie a story to the area they serve. If there's no local connection, usually there's no story, particularly for smaller community publications and electronic media. A local tie can be a person who lives or works in the area or an organization that serves the neighborhood. It can also be something big that has local impact, such as federal budget cuts forcing the closure of a local program. If something really huge hits the national media, like Hurricane Katrina in 2005, local reporters and editors will look for ways to "localize" it for readers and viewers by focusing on how our own community might respond to a similar situation.

**Timeliness**   Stories are like loaves of bread. They get stale if they sit around too long or are told too often. A fresh idea or pilot program is more likely to get covered because it's (new)s. Connecting a story to a current social issue, trend or news event or to a particular time of year, event, anniversary, etc., also can provide a timely hook on which to hang a media pitch.

**Impact**   How many people will be affected? How many jobs will be created? How much money will be saved? The bigger the impact, the better the story.

**Heart**   This goes back to having real people tell the story. A story that talks about the high cost of prescription drugs in terms of dollars and cents is boring. But telling that story through the eyes of an elderly woman forced to choose between medications and food really hits home with people.

**Prominence**   Dignitaries, celebrities and other well-known people make news. Organizations lucky enough to get Brad Pitt as a spokesman don't need to worry about publicity (although their message may get lost in all the paparazzi). Locally, an influential person who speaks on behalf of your organization can help make an issue newsworthy.

**Good Visuals**   A newspaper article that runs with a photograph is more likely to be read than one without. People are drawn to pictures and put off by long gray columns of type. That's why it's so important to find people who are willing to have their pictures taken. Natural, candid shots are better than posed, so think of "photo ops" in which people are animated, not stiff.

**Vital/Useful Information**   People need to know certain things to be productive and involved citizens, to live happier or longer or better lives, or to do things more productively.  Practical information and "news you can use" often make good story ideas – for example, tips to help kids succeed in school or advice for a fulfilling retirement.

**Odd/Weird/Extraordinary**   Reporters sometime call these "Hey, Mabel, will you look at this!" stories. You likely won't have too many ideas that fit this category, but even something slightly off-beat or different – like 25,000 pounds of frozen chicken donated to a food bank – is more likely to grab a reporter's attention than something he/she has written about dozens of times.