



OUTREACH AND EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

A Field Guide for the West Africa Election Observers Network



INTRODUCTION TO WAEON FIELD GUIDE SERIES



Nonpartisan citizen observers play an important role during elections by raising public confidence in the election process, deterring electoral malfeasance, exposing irregularities, and providing citizens with important information concerning the integrity of elections. In 2011, with support from the National Democratic Institute (NDI) through a grant from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), citizen observer groups from 11 West African countries formed the West Africa Election Observers Network (WAEON) to support nonpartisan election observation in the subregion and increase dialogue and cross-fertilization among observation organizations from different countries. As of March 2013, the following organizations are members of WAEON: Burkina Faso's Mouvement Burkinabé des Droits de l'Homme et des Peuples (MBDHP), Ghana's Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO), Guinea's Consortium pour l'Observation Domestique des Elections en Guinée (CODE), the Ivorian Convention de la Société Civile Ivoirienne (CSCI), Liberia's Institute for Research and Democratic Development (IREDD), Mali's Appui au Processus Electoral au Mali (APEM), Nigeria's Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), Niger's Association Nigérienne pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme (ANDDH), Senegal's Rencontre Africaine pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme (RADDHO), Sierra Leone's National Election Watch (NEW), and Togo's Concertation Nationale de la Société Civile (CNSC). WAEON aims to strengthen electoral processes and encourage citizen participation in democratic governance. The network is part of the Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors (www.gndem.org). Since its inception, WAEON has organized a series of training academies for its members on topics such as systematic election observation, communication techniques and strategies to prevent election-related violence, and sustaining electoral and political reforms in the post-election period.

The training academies inspired the network to develop a series of practical field guides as easy-to-use reference tools for citizen election observation groups. To date, three field guides have been published in English and French:

- Systematic Methods for Advancing Election Observation
- Outreach and External Communication
- Materials for Professional Election Observation: Designing Forms, Manuals and Trainings

The field guides complement other reference tools available on domestic election observation, such as NDI's handbooks, *How Domestic Organizations Monitor Elections* and *The Quick Count and Election Observation*. These and other resources are available on NDI's website www.ndi.org.

For future inquiries on WAEON, please contact the WAEON Secretariat located at the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana):

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1

Understanding Outreach and External Communication

What is outreach?

Conducting outreach is inherent in any election monitoring effort. For the purpose of this field guide, outreach is a range of activities to communicate and increase public knowledge and awareness towards your election observation efforts. All information that you collect, including your findings, is useless if you do not and cannot communicate it effectively to your stakeholders and the general public.

Why is outreach important for domestic observers?

- Develop relationships with key stakeholders
- Advise key stakeholders about your methodology, activities, and findings
- Build support for your organization, for example, for observers, volunteer recruitment, and even for fundraising
- Build credibility and promote an image of impartiality of your organization
- Inform public about the electoral process and

prevent and correct any misinformation or misconceptions

- Ensure the integrity of the electoral process
- Receive feedback about your activities

Who are the external stakeholders?

There is no such thing as the general public. You will not be able to reach everyone; therefore you need to focus on specific groups of voters and connect with their interests. The target groups of an election observer organization include:

Election management bodies

It is in your interest to build a cooperative relationship with the election commission. They can provide important information for your organization, such as the list of polling stations, election regulations and materials, and provide you access and accreditation to observe the electoral



Case Study: Senegal

Selecting a Spokesperson for a Unified Message

Members of leading civil society groups in Senegal collaborated under a broad coalition during the 2012 electoral cycle. The groups held regular coordination meetings, shared data center space and held joint press conferences. However, the groups initially decided to each have their own spokesperson present at the press conferences, leading to lengthy events that lacked a clear message.

After evaluating the outreach strategy used for the presidential election, the coalition agreed to have

a sole spokesperson present the joint statement at press conferences for the legislative elections. The coalition identified the leader of the Collectif des organisations de la société civile pour des élections (COSCE) as a neutral, well-spoken and respected representative to act as spokesperson for the coalition. He was joined onstage by fellow leaders who represented the diversity of the coalition. These other men and women did not read the statement but were invited to participate in the question and answer session with journalists.

process. Early in your planning process, you should establish an open channel of communication with them and build their trust.

Political parties and candidates

Being an impartial and non-partisan election organization does not mean your organization should not have any contact with political parties or candidates. On the contrary, it is essential to establish relationships with all political parties or candidates. It will help them to respect and appreciate the purpose of your observation and may encourage them to provide you with information that will be useful to your monitoring efforts.

Local and international media

Mass media is often the main source of information for the public. Therefore, monitoring organizations should establish and maintain contact with local and international journalists.

Parliament

The parliament or legislature is the legal institution responsible for making laws, including electoral laws. Your organization should engage the members of parliament to ensure that your election observation's recommendations, especially those related to electoral legal framework reforms, will be considered.

Other election observers

It is important for your organization to sustain relationships with other election observers - both domestic and international- including diplomatic missions. Having regular coordination meetings and sharing your findings with these groups are some best practices to establish these relationships.

Donors and diplomatic community

To have a successful election observation you need reliable volunteers, but also adequate funding. Keeping your donors engaged in your election monitoring efforts is vital to your fundraising success. A few donor cultivation activities include providing donors with election briefings, regular program updates, volunteer opportunities, etc.

Targeted voters

You can use several techniques to break down voters in general into more manageable and meaningful groups, either by using basic demographics (gender, age, geographical areas, education, ethnicity, etc.) or by seeking out volunteers already engaged in similar causes.

If you focus your limited resources on the people who really do matter most to your organization, you will spend less money and time and you will get better results.



Case Study: Côte D'Ivoire

Selecting a Spokesperson in a Fractured Civil Society

During the 2010 political crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, multiple citizen observer missions competed for press and their voices were lost in the turmoil of accusations and misinformation. In an effort to rebuild links within the observer community ahead of the 2011 legislative elections, six civil society coalitions in Côte d'Ivoire launched a joint violence monitoring effort. This effort was led by a coordinating committee, comprised of one leader

from each of the coalitions.

Each month, the six coalitions held a joint press conference, with each member of the coordinating committee present. While their presence showed unity, the role of sole spokesperson at each press conference would rotate among the committee members. This allowed each group to be equally represented while maintaining the unified voice of civil society in the sensitive political environment.

Who should be responsible for doing outreach?

Managing outreach or external communication is one of the most difficult and time consuming duties in an election monitoring operation. Most organizations assign one media officer or form a public outreach team to fulfill the organization's public information needs.

Your organization or coalition also needs to identify an appropriate spokesperson. A spokesperson is an individual responsible for media relations and

available for media calls, questions, quotes and interviews. If you do not choose the person that will represent your organization, the media will choose the spokesperson by default. Organizations working in coalitions or close coordination should select a sole spokesperson and present their statements at a joint press conference. In general, a good spokesperson must be knowledgeable about election-related issues, respected by the public, politically neutral and independent, and comfortable talking and appearing in front of journalists and being quoted in media sources.

Outreach and Communications Strategy

2

Developing & Maintaining Contact Lists

In order to reach people effectively, you need to know enough about them. The first step you need to do is to develop a contact list. Contact lists are catalogues of the names of important and relevant stakeholders who may be interested in your election program. You should include your target audiences (as mentioned in 1.3.) in your contact list. The list should contain the name of the organization, institution, or media outlet, office address, general office phone, direct phone number, fax number, cell-phone number, email address, and the deadline to receive submissions (for media outlets). You can collect this information via phone calls, media directories, personal relationships, and by reviewing newspapers and other resources.

For media outlets, you should know specifically who to contact at the organization.

- TV stations: assignment editors, public service announcement directors, correspondents, executive producers, commentators, analysts, or reporters who cover elections, as well as anyone responsible for booking guest appearances
- Radio stations: reporters who cover elections, assignment editors, commentators, analysts, show hosts, and producers
- Newspapers & magazine: managing editor, senior editors, political section editor, editorial page writers, reporters who cover elections, and columnists
- Online: online editors and bloggers

Develop your list in a computer program that is compatible with your mailing service, fax, email list, etc. You also need to develop a system to maintain and update your contact lists, which can be as simple as an Excel spreadsheet.



Identify A Few Top Media Contacts

It is more effective to concentrate your efforts on a couple dozen of key reporters—get to know what topics they like and what they tend to write about most and establish a trust relationship with them—rather than to spend your time sending out dozens of generic emails to reporters.

Understanding the Media

The most common misconception among observer groups is that your activities will speak for themselves. A monitoring organization has two valuable contributions to offer to media outlets: evidence-based information and informed opinion about the electoral process. However, if your organization does not know how to engage the media effectively, your ability to reach a larger audience is compromised. It is therefore important for you to understand and adapt to how media outlets think and work.

- **Understanding their deadlines** - Generally, it is best to call reporters before noon or 13:00. Avoid, if at all possible, contacting reporters at 17:00 or 18:00 in the evening unless you are returning an urgent call or you have the

answer to a question a reporter asked you pertaining to that day's story. Media outlets will have special deadlines on election day.

- **Be a credible source** - In general, reporters look for stories that are newsworthy, timely, relevant to their audience, credible, and supported with facts/evidence.
- **Media tracking** - It is important to keep track of the media's coverage of your organization and news coverage related to your monitoring efforts. Tracking and compiling your media coverage can help you measure the success of your communication strategy, evaluate which audiences you were able to reach, and follow-up with reporters on future story ideas. You can ask a volunteer or intern to take on this responsibility.

EXAMPLE

Media Tracking Charts

Media Tracking Sheet

Headline	Date	Media	Outlet	Location	Reporter/ Journalist	Summary

Media Hits Tracking Sheet

Date	Media	Outlet	Location	Reporter/ Journalist	Interviewee	Notes

Developing an Outreach and External Communication Plan

Developing an external communication plan will help you clarify the purpose and objective of your outreach strategy. Without a plan, your communication products will likely be less focused and could actually work against your organization's overall objectives. There are certain key components of an effective communication plan:

- **Background**- The background should give a brief description of your organization or coalition, an analysis of the elections' political context, and an overview of the election related challenges you want to address. Be sure to also include your organization's previous election results and findings from past elections.
- **Goal** - This section should include a statement that identifies the specific goals your organization would like to achieve by implementing its communication strategy. Goals could include deterring electoral

malpractices or instilling greater public confidence in electoral institutions.

- **Objectives** - Your objectives will outline specific and realistic steps toward achieving your goals. The objectives must be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time bound).
- **Positioning message** - Develop a concise, well-crafted mission statement that conveys to the public what your organization does and why it matters. If crafted carefully, your positioning message will give your audience a clear understanding of your organization's identity and focus. Each time a leader of your organization speaks, the positioning message should be repeated and reinforced by the type of language used and the information shared.
- **Target audiences** - In your planning process, decide to whom you should be talking. What is the most effective way to reach your target



Case Study: Indonesia

Developing A Media Plan

In 2004, a coalition of four election monitoring organizations in Indonesia called Jurdil Pemilu 2004 (Honest and Free Elections 2004) conducted a parallel vote tabulation for the legislative elections. To differentiate the coalition's new approach from that of other election monitoring organizations (EMOs) using statistics to produce monitoring reports, Jurdil Pemilu 2004 realized that it needed a comprehensive media outreach strategy. However, since the coalition did not have the money, time, and staff to develop a comprehensive plan, Jurdil Pemilu 2004 focused on the three most important questions:

- 1) Who are we trying to reach?
- 2) What is our message for this audience?
- 3) What is the best way to deliver our message?

They reached out not only to mainstream media, but also to, for example, business communities

to get their support. To reach the business community they invited Mr. Jose Conception Jr, a CEO of Swift Food and Chairman of NAMFREL, the lead citizen observation organization from the Philippines to give a presentation on the business community's involvement in and cooperation with NAMFREL's work in the Philippines. They also involved a businessman, Mr. Noke Kiroyan, at that time the President of the International Chamber of Commerce – Indonesian National Committee, to be the advisory board member of Jurdil Pemilu. The representatives from the business community on the advisory board helped with fundraising activities and in-kind donations like direct mail, presentations, etc. This cross-sector coordination helped raise public awareness of the coalition's work and show the importance of an engaged civil society.

audience? What type of media coverage would be most effective for your organization to reach its target audience: radio, newspaper, TV?

- **Tools and activities** - Provide detail on specific outreach activities you plan to conduct in order to reach your target audience. Keep in mind that not every activity is appropriate for each message or audience, and printed tools and materials are easier to share with some audiences over others. Also be aware of

time and budget constraints, some outreach activities you may want to pursue may be too time-consuming or expensive.

- **Timeline** - Develop a project timeline that includes all of the relevant responsibilities/tasks to be completed and their deadlines.
- **Budget** - Estimate the time, staffing, and financial needs involved with your outreach activities. Prioritize your target audiences and focus on high-impact but low cost activities.

Developing Media Guidelines

Media Guidelines should be issued to all staff and observers, explaining how sensitive information should be treated and who is designated to talk to the media, including via social media such as Facebook, Twitter, etc.). Keep media guidelines simple and realistic. Some questions that will help you define your media guidelines:

- How should the spokesperson identify himself/ herself? How should your observers identify themselves when they are engaged in social media for their personal use? Do you want them to reveal their position in your organization?
- What information are the staff and observers allowed to disclose? The information your group collects is politically sensitive, thus it should be treated carefully by all those involved. If information is leaked to the public

or taken out of context, it could have negative implications for your group and possibly for the political situation. A common media guideline is to prohibit any individual observers from making comments to the media.

- What is acceptable behavior for a member of an observer group? Observers should maintain impartiality, including in any social media interaction.
- What are the consequences if someone breaks these rules? Who is responsible for enforcing these guidelines? One outspoken, partisan observer can damage the credibility of the entire organization. Appropriate action must be taken to limit the damage in instances when a member of your organization has failed to follow the established guidelines or broken the rules.

Outreach Monitoring & Evaluation

By measuring the effectiveness of your organization's outreach strategy, you can gain a better understanding of how your communication could be improved. Monitoring your outreach may include the following activities:

- Keeping track of participants' lists and contact information
- Preparing a questionnaire for feedback to be completed by trusted partners

- Monitoring your website hits in connection with certain events, after having sent out a press release, etc.
- Monitoring your social media activities
- Keeping track of who received your distribution lists and the number of publications disseminated. You may get feedback from those on your lists through surveys or focus groups afterward.

Some key questions to evaluate your outreach strategy are:

- To what extent does the communication strategy respond to the information needs of the target audience(s)?
- How are your tools and messages in line with the objectives of your outreach strategy, how cohesive is your outreach package, and how

does it compare with other existing initiatives in the field?

- How effective is the communication strategy and policy in improving knowledge about your organization and the information you are sharing?
- To what extent does your communication strategy contribute to a better understanding and perception of your organization?

Positioning your organization as an expert source

Being viewed as an expert source is a great outreach strategy because it can produce a lot of publicity. Media outlets are often seeking sources who can provide commentary and analysis on specialized topics, and an election observation organization is well-suited to become a source of commentary on elections. To be perceived as an expert source, your organization must have five qualities: be accessible; be cooperative; own a well-understood niche; build a solid track record; and be trustworthy.

Identify the appropriate person or people in your organization who have both the technical knowledge and the communication qualities necessary to represent you when the media requests your expertise. This person may be different than your advisory board's spokesperson, especially if your board members are not closely following electoral developments, law reform, or other technical issues the media would ask you to address.

3

Outreach Tools

There are many tools that an election monitoring organization can utilize to distribute information to their stakeholders. Do not depend solely on mainstream media to get your message out; mainstream media is often the most expensive,

and civil society has limited resources to devote to advertising. Keep in mind that there is no one tool that can reach all target audiences. In general, there are three categories of outreach tools: paper based, face-to-face, and technology based tools.

Paper-based Tools

Information kits

An information kit is a package of various communication materials from your organization to provide general background about your organization. Typically, it contains: a profile of the organization/coalition, previous media releases, brochures describing your election observation activities and methodologies, a short bio of your spokesperson, and contact information.

Media advisories

Media advisories are essentially invitations to journalists to attend your event. Typically, such advisories are only a two or three sentence paragraph, offering just enough information to compel the media to send someone to cover the story.

Press/ News releases

A press release is a standardized way of communicating with journalists. Editors and reporters get hundreds of news releases every day. Therefore, it is important to make your release newsworthy. A good press release uses facts, statistics, and quotes to support a story to present and validate a point of view.

Layout of your press release

- Identify your organization - If you are not using letterhead for the first page, place your

organization's name and information in the upper left hand corner of the first page.

- Highlight the release time and date: On the left, indicate the timing of the release.
- Provide contact information- On the right or below, give the name of your spokesperson and his/her title. Make sure that the person whose name is listed is well informed and prepared to answer questions about the release. Give their contact information, cell phone, and email.

Structure of your press release

News stories are structured in an inverted pyramid structure, putting the most important, interesting points in the beginning or 'on top' in declining order of importance, not chronologically.

- Your headline should be placed at the center of the page in capital letters. It should be brief, clear, and punchy. The hook of a press release is in the headline. A good headline is one that compels a journalist to read the rest of your press release.
- If you need to add a little more information, a short subtitle can appear under the headline.
- The first paragraph is the most important paragraph; it should convey all the main points of your release. If the journalists read no more than the headline and the lead paragraph, they should know all the basic information of the story. This paragraph should be no more than 30 words; the fewer the better.



Case Study: Sierra Leone

Attracting Media Attention With A Press Release

In 2008, the National Election Watch (NEW) in Sierra Leone was concerned about the NEC proceeding with boundary delimitation without making it an open and inclusive process. Below is the press statement they released on the subject.

Faulty start March local council election process in Sierra Leone

18 February 2008, Freetown

NEW is concerned about the boundary delimitation exercise moving forward without respect for due process. In particular, NEC's deliberate exclusion of key stakeholder and refusal to put people at the centre of the process. The process is being conducted too swiftly and it also lacks a coordinated outreach strategy in which citizens and other stakeholders can be included to ensure understanding and ownership of the outcomes for a successful delimitation exercise.

NEW believes that the process should be people centered and not solely a numbers game, so as not to exacerbate tensions still simmering from the last election. This process, more complex than the constituency delimitation, requires full engagement of all stakeholders including civil society, local authorities, political parties, and district NEC officials as NEC did in the last election around the constituency delimitation process.

The ongoing Boundary Delimitation process, which is largely conducted by Statistics Sierra Leone has significantly increased the number of wards in some areas and reduced in others without justifiable explanation to the people. Many wards in some district councils have been reduced, while other wards in mainly city councils have been increased. As there has been inadequate explanation and consultation about the process, these changes have caused a lot of resentment in various communities. Citizens do not understand the process and this will have long term consequences on development.

Whilst the process is essentially a statistical exercise, it however has long term implications around ward delimitation, which can affect representation, and have profound consequences on national development. The socio-political and human dimension should be paramount and consultation and engagement should be widespread at district and ward levels to contribute to including people in the practice of democracy.

Voter education on the process has not begun well. There is need for coordination and also collaboration in the process. As in the last election, the holding of regular stakeholders meetings by the NEC enhanced information flow and also created understanding in the processes. The regular forums were an avenue for clarifying issues of concern to stakeholders and the citizenry. NEC should start engaging stakeholders as a matter of urgency and reconvene their regular meetings. Also the district level should replicate a similar mechanism so that information sharing can be opened up to every Sierra Leonean.

The National Election Watch (NEW) recently held its national meeting in Kambia on the 16th, February, 2008. Present at this meeting were regional, district coordinators and the strategic management committee members who reported on the Boundary Delimitation process of wards for the local council elections. The NEW, a domestic coalition of civic and professional groups as well as international and local NGOs, is focusing on civil society oversight of the national electoral processes.

- The second paragraph is a good place for a quote from an organizational leader. Be sure to include the leader's full name and title. Numbers, such as a few, select percentages from observer findings, are good at concisely presenting information.
- Develop the story further in the third and fourth paragraph. The press release does not have to include every fact or statistic related to your findings. Report the most important and salient facts in the release. When deciding which facts are most important, ask yourself the following questions: Is this new information? Does this information support and validate the policy position we advocate? Is this information interesting and can it be presented in a captivating manner?
- The final paragraph should include information about your organization, your source of funding, and objectives.

Pitch Letters

Sometimes you need to attract interest in your organization or story by sending a letter (pitch letter) to your target audience. A pitch letter can start out with a question or an interesting fact that connects your organization with your target audience and provokes a reaction from your audience; it does not need to tell the whole story. Sometimes, pitch letters are written to accompany press releases or media advisories.

A lot of printed media has a section for letters to editors. You can send a letter to an editor of a newspaper or printed media as a timely response to a specific article that appeared in their media or that would be of interest to their readers. To increase the chance of your letter being published, call the newspaper's editor in advance.

Opinion editorials (op-ed)

An opinion editorial is longer than a letter. The purpose of an op-ed is to provide knowledge through a written commentary on an issue of interest to a certain readership. It is an opportunity to address a specific issue that has not been covered by the media or to provide your organization's unique point of view on the current topic in the news. You may need to contact the media outlet for length requirements (usually 600-800 words). You should avoid sending the op-ed to multiple media outlets that share the same market, as newspapers prefer to have exclusive publishing rights. However, you can submit the same op-ed to media in different regions.

If you know that you will submit an op-ed at a specific time (for example, after you finalize your observation findings), call the editor at least one week in advance and ask to reserve a space for your contribution.

Face-to-face Tools

It is important to remember the power of your network as a whole and the connections that your volunteers have with each other.

Presentation

Most often, you will need to present your observation methodology and findings to a group. When this is the case, your challenge is to engage and win the buy-in of your audience. Therefore, you need to deliver a clear presentation that captures the interest and attention of your audience. A good presentation involves a dynamic speaker and may include visual aids, such as powerpoint slides or photos.

Phone call

Individual calls by your outreach team to a reporter or news outlet are excellent ways of promoting a story, responding quickly to breaking news, and generating a radio, television, or newspaper interview on your topic. However, be organized before you initiate a press call. Have appropriate background materials, the names of spokespersons and press contacts and where they can be reached in front of you before you get on the phone.

Start your conversation with a reporter by saying: “Hello, this is (give your name) from organization x. Do you have a couple of minutes to talk or are you on a deadline?” If they say they have a moment, you can then make your best pitch. If however, they say they are too busy or on a deadline, ask them when would be a good time to call back and get off the phone politely and quickly.

Briefings series

It is considered good practice to organize a briefing series at the beginning of your activities to introduce the election observation project and publicly explain your objectives to various stakeholders. If it is possible, offering tours of your data center during the election-day simulation provides a good opportunity to promote your election activities to the media and other electoral stakeholders. After the simulation, you can hold a press conference to share the methodology, number of observers, the percentage of calls expected that were received, and the capacity of the communication center to receive and process the information.

Press conferences

Press conferences are a vital means of getting information out to the public; a press conference is a staged media event during which a spokesperson from your organization conveys your message and answers questions from the media. There are two types of press conferences: first, regular briefings to update your stakeholders on the progress of your observation mission; second, special events to communicate your findings.

Tips on organizing a press conference (see Annex 1 for a more detailed guide):

- **Location selection** - Find an accessible location and room that is convenient for reporters and electoral stakeholders. Consider the number of invitees; you want a room large enough to accommodate all invitees but want to avoid the possibility of vacant seats. Use a



Case Study: Sudan

Joint Press Conference As A Symbol Of Unity

The Sudanese Group for Democracy and Elections (SuGDE) and the South Sudanese Network for Democracy and Elections (SuNDE) conducted a joint press conference and released a joint statement after observing the South Sudan independence referendum in 2010. At the press

conference, two members of SuNDE sat alongside two members of SuGDE – including a women’s rights leader – in a striking display of unity. The resulting photos conveyed a powerful message that a statement alone could not.

public media center, if available.

- **Timing** - Pick a convenient date and time. Generally, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday are best, and try to not schedule before 10:00 or after 14:00 to ensure you can be published the next day. Nowadays, some organizations also conduct press conferences on a Sunday so that they may be featured on the Monday news. In scheduling your press conference, try not to overlap with similar media events and other relevant media activities.
- **Prepare press kits**- Prepare and print your media kits ahead of time and have them ready for distribution at the press conference. Have other background information and brochures available at the registration table.
- **Prepare an agenda** - Coordinate and set an agenda for the press conference, i.e. time allocated to and content that will be conveyed by each speaker. Always allow enough time for questions and answers. The Q&A time should be well organized: journalists should be asked to raise their hands, and a moderator should give the floor to journalists one by one; journalist should first introduce themselves and their media outlet and then pose a short and concise question directed to a specific speaker;
- **Consider visuals** - Even if you have a sole spokesperson, think about how the individuals of your organization present can represent the country as a whole. For instance, if multiple people are sitting at the head table, make sure they include both men and women and visible members of the major segments of society.
- **Follow up with the media** - Send press kits to those media outlets that did not attend, call reporters who did not attend but indicated an interest, and summarize the main issues raised at the press conference. For future reference, monitor and tape the coverage of your press conference and file the material for your media archive.

Interviews

Interviews are one-on-one, on the record conversations with journalists, mainly to get information from you.

- **Before the interview:** Be clear what the interview is going to be about. Ask for a summary of the issues that will be covered. Know what you want to say during the interview. Think of the two to three most



Control Your Interview

When they ask questions which require yes or no answer, listen carefully before agreeing. Don't let journalists put words in your mouth; they may attribute the entire statement to you. Take control of the question.

important points that you want to get across. Set the boundaries. If you are called unexpectedly, it is ok to tell a journalist that you will call him/her back in a few minutes while you prepare yourself and gather the necessary information.

- **During the interview:** Use the pyramids technique in phrasing statements or responses; make the most important point first. Keep your language simple, do not use professional jargon, define technical terms as simply as possible, and speak in short sentences. If you do not know the answer, say so, and that you will do some research and call them back to follow up on their question. Never give information if you are not sure it is factually correct. Always use facts or findings from your observation to back up your points. If the interviewer keeps moving away from the points you want to make, use so-called "bridges" to get back to your points, such as "let me add," "I am often asked," "it seems that the most important issue is," etc.
- **After the interview:** Remember that anything you say to a journalist is on record and may be used by the media. Do not say anything you would not want to have published or broadcast. And make sure to ask when the story will be published. Let the journalist know that you will be checking the story he/she writes to make sure it is accurate; when it is published, check it, and follow up on any inconsistencies.

Technology-based Outreach

The widespread use of mobile phones and the internet has transformed the traditional one-way communication system into a more interactive media environment.

Mobile phones

Use your contact list to develop a mobile database. You can use SMS with both the media and your network to invite stakeholders, announce calls for action or network activities, give feedback, or fundraise. For two-way communication with observers, there are platforms like Frontline SMS and Clickatell that make sending mass SMS to specific contacts easy.

Website

Ideally, an observer group should have an online presence in the form of a website. The website should be easy to find through a simple web search and certain elements should be included on the site: the organization's history, mission, biographies of key staff, information about funding and current projects, reports, FAQs about the organization, archived news stories, newsletters, annual reports, online brochures, upcoming events, etc.

Checklist to evaluate your current website :

- Does the domain name make sense?
- Can I tell what website I am on, even after just a brief glance? Is your organization's logo and

name clearly displayed at the top right corner of the page?

- Is there a clear path to answer most commonly asked questions? Is the navigation intuitive to direct visitors to what interests them?
- Does the home page include images? Are people featured throughout the website?
- Are there stories featured that highlight your organization's successes?
- Can a visitor easily make a donation from the home page?
- Is your organization capturing email addresses?
- Is it easy for visitors to your website to contact your staff?
- Is out-of-date content regularly removed or archived?

Blog

A blog is a simple version of a website containing mostly brief, regularly updated posts, usually in a format similar to a diary. Blogs have quickly become influential as a tool to inform, influence, manage and, in a few cases, manipulate the news media. It is simpler and easier to update a blog compared to a website, which often requires a developer. The goal of writing blogs is to communicate to an audience about your observation.

Once you hit publish, you still must promote the content; distribute your posts via RSS feeds and emailing. Share each blog post with relevant social

Deciding on a Blog

You need a blog if:

- You need a better way to share minor developments
- You want to take people behind the scenes
- You need a better way to organize the resources you have available
- You need to react quickly
- You need to store content for a more comprehensive publication at a later date

You do not need a blog if:

- Transparency presents a threat to the safety of members of your organization
- Your organization finds it difficult to write in an informal tone
- Your organization is uncomfortable with the idea of criticism
- You lack time for regular updates
- You cannot articulate the value of your blog

media venues. Include sharing icons at the top and bottom of your post. Also promote your blog posts on your other media resources, such as your website and press releases.

You can use blogs to report on various activities: field reports can convey stories from your field observers; inside stories let you share insights on how your observers actually do their work; you can also use blog posts for event coverage.

Social Media

Social media comprises various platforms that enable users to participate in, comment on, and create content as a means of communicating with their social group, other users, and the public. Social media enhances speed of information dissemination and enables real time communication. It also offers election observation groups a chance to move away from one-way communication towards a type of communication in which they can interact with, listen to, and engage with their constituencies. It supplements and in some cases amplifies the mainstream media, but it should not replace it.

Observer groups can use social media like YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter to raise public awareness of their observation projects, raise funds, recruit observers, enhance existing communication activities, and more. If your organization launches a new online initiative, ensure that you have the capacity for both a marketing strategy and to manage it once it is launched. Social networks are often about creating a dialogue rather than just another channel through which to push out your information.



TIP

Get Free Advertising From Google

One of the cheapest and easiest ways to get free advertising is to apply for a Google Grant (<http://www.google.com/grants>) When you as a registered non-profit receive a grant from Google, you receive up to \$10,000 per month in in-kind “AdWords” advertising for your organization, so people see your organization’s link when they search Google. It is an easy way for you to get more exposure for your cause.

Best practices in using social media

Ensure you have a capacity to manage your online presence.

- Pick a username that reflects your organization. Make it easy for interested people to find you.
- Promote your social media account in all of your PR materials. Integrate various social media accounts into a branded online presence.
- Reach out, follow other people who share your interests on Twitter, and become fans of relevant pages or people on Facebook. Engage

in conversation with them and ask questions.

- If you are using Twitter, be brief and make the limit of 140 characters count. Use URL shorteners like bit.ly or tinyurl so you can include web address links without using many characters.
- Use images and videos. Users are attracted to multimedia and are more likely to share interesting photos, graphics or videos than simply written content. Make an effort to integrate visuals into your social media strategy.

Monitor what others are doing

To stay relevant to your audience, you also should follow what others in your field are doing. Start by listening to members of your organization and people connected to your organization to see their interests. Use Google alerts, Twitter searches etc. to track mentions of your organization on the web and in social media and blogs; also consider variations of your organization's name, your program and event names. Install Google site analytics (<http://www.google.com/analytics>) on your organization's website to measure what interests your visitors the most and adapt your outreach strategy accordingly.



Case Study: **Peru**

Promoting Your Organization Via Youtube

A major election monitoring organization in Peru, Transparencia used Youtube to document its 18 year legacy of fighting for democracy and citizen engagement in Peru.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mj3tWzYArvk

Technology-based Outreach

Type	Advantages	Disadvantages
Printed Material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to be kept, filed, and taken home or to the office • Material can be read anywhere • Good to reach audience that does not have email access • Most well-known and widely used type of communications media • Available as a long-term resource for static information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher cost to produce than other media types • Long lead time to create, produce, and distribute
Audiovisual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to influence people through multiple senses: sight and sound • Professionally done videos can help make a significant impact in communicating information • Ability to reach wider audiences than print media, as some people simply do not rely on reading for their information • Accessible to the illiterate • Best for supporting a presentation in meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to produce and distribute widely on limited budgets • Requires additional skills to produce • Generally not a reference tool for users to return to after initial view
Electronic Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a low-cost, quick way to send information to varying audiences of different sizes • Creating e-mail groups, while time consuming upfront, will facilitate email distribution over the course of the observation project • Low cost and quick turnaround time • Website/ blog allows for up-to-date project information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to track if your targeted audiences actually receive, open and read your electronic communication • Project website may not be regularly checked by large segments of the public • Audience may access website for a particular piece of information but some may give up before finding what they are looking for • Internet may not be easily accessible to the broad public outside of the capital
Posters, Banners, and Bulletin Boards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good for providing high level information (e.g., goals and timelines) • A unique approach to highlighting major findings and events (e.g., survey results, voter education, observation results) • Helps to create long-term focus on the project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High cost if done professionally and widely distributed • Difficulty in placing at the appropriate places throughout target area(s) • Time consuming and costly to keep updated
Face-to-Face Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most effective way to communicate with your audience • Allows for Q&A and real time feedback • Allows audience to hear about and feel part of the observation • Best for targeted partners or stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to ensure that consistent messages are conveyed • Time intensive effort to ensure that your entire internal structure (including your volunteers) has updated presentations and informational toolkits • Difficult to reach beyond a small, targeted audience

Election Statements and Reports

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As an observer group, you should release different kinds of statements and reports over the course of the observation project. It is considered a best practice to make statements at every stage of the election you observed. If you are conducting long-term election monitoring, you should issue your findings on a regular basis, for instance, once every two weeks, or at least once a month.

Election Day Observation

For Election Day monitoring, almost all groups release their results in a minimum of two phases:

- **Preliminary statements** - Preliminary statements provide the qualitative information based on the initial findings of the election day process. You can hold either a midday press conference to share the results from the opening and voting process, or within 24 hours of the polls closing to provide an initial assessment of the overall election day process. Should a critical incident occur that your observers witnessed, you should report it immediately as well.
- **Final report** - A final report should be released within two months of the election. It should provide a comprehensive analysis of all aspects of the electoral process observed, including the pre-election period, election day, and post-election period. If there are outstanding complaints or a recount process after the election, the final report should include analysis for the entire post-election period. It should also provide final conclusions and recommendations for reform and improvement.

How to write your statements and reports

- Base your statements on facts and observations verified by your observers.
- Double-check your facts and ensure that your

statements do not go beyond the evidence you have. If challenged, it will be the responsibility to prove that your organization's statement is substantially true.

- Findings should be accurate, objective, and verifiable. Avoid statements that are based on speculation, hearsay or anecdotes.
- Provide analysis of the findings and quantify your findings if possible. Your statement should not just list violations, but it should assess the violations in the context of the overall environment. One instance of vote buying should not be the headline of your statement, if the overall process was positive, but a systematic pattern of vote buying should be addressed. The statement should contain specific facts of what was observed and analyze the observations.
- Choose your words carefully, pay attention to tone. Avoid inflammatory language and always advocate for peace. Be diplomatic in your presentation.
- Highlight positive aspects and best practices from the election process. Compare the current election to previous elections in the country to recognize progress or identify shortcomings.
- Reference international and regional standards such as the Declaration of Global Principles for Nonpartisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations or international rights treaties to make statements stronger.
- Recommendations should be action-based and targeted to specific audiences or institutions. Do not just advocate for greater transparency; specifically address the election commission and advocate for the release of all results data at the polling station level.

When things go wrong

Mistakes will happen, and when they do, you need to respond strategically. You will want to correct

the damage, but at the same time, you must continue to build a good working relationship with the stakeholders and media involved. Journalists are professionally obliged to correct errors and will normally do so if you can prove they made a mistake. Here are some tips you can follow for correcting mistakes:

- **Speak to the source** - If the error is small and does not affect you seriously, speak to the reporter who wrote the story. This gives him or her a chance to explain the mistake to the editor without getting into too much trouble. If the mistake is seriously damaging, take your complaint directly to the editor or station manager. Put your complaint in writing, showing clearly what the mistake was and what you expect the editor to do about it.
- **Request correction** - Promptly ask for the correction of factual inaccuracies. Be brief and specific, and do not get into a debate over the tone of the article; it will cloud your request. Although they find it embarrassing, if necessary, all media organizations will publish or broadcast corrections. When an error occurs, it is worthwhile asking for a correction. Yet think carefully before demanding one. When there has been a minor mistake in an article that is generally damaging to you, demanding a correction can work against you, because in making the correction, the paper will have to explain how the mistake happened, and this may mean repeating the same negative information about your organization.
- **Take legal action if necessary** - Legal action should be a last resort – it is expensive, it will ruin your relationship with the media, and

it may mean that information comes out in court that you do not want published.

Always have a contingency plan

Every observer group should have a contingency plan in place to manage crises. Create this plan before you need one.

A contingency plan should :

- **Identify a substitute spokesperson** - Back-up persons for the communication managers and spokespersons should be identified. Who will take over your communication manager's job if he/she is temporarily unable to perform his/her duties?
- **Train your backups** - Backup spokespeople must be trained and have the appropriate access to the systems and social media. They need to know the media strategy and what is required of them.
- **Listen for feedback** - Use your tracking mechanism and social media monitoring to seek feedback. These analytical instruments can provide critical information about how the public is reacting to and talking about your organization.
- **Establish an internal communication structure** - Create a process to enable people, especially your board, senior management, and PR to communicate with each other and react quickly regardless of the day and time.
- **Provide refresher trainings** - Review the internal communications plan regularly to ensure that staff members are aware of their responsibilities and who to contact.

Press Conference Checklist

Press Conference Checklist

Date and location: _____

Topic: _____

Speakers: _____

Moderator: _____

Responsible for organization: _____

At least a week before:

- ☐ Check, pick, and reserve a convenient date and time
- ☐ Check, pick, and reserve a proper location and room
- ☐ Prepare and send media notice/invitation
- ☐ Prepare press kits

At least a day before:

- ☐ Coordinate and develop an agenda for the press conference (time and content line of speakers)
- ☐ Anticipate media questions, brainstorm in a larger team
- ☐ Check attendance of invited journalists and media by phone
- ☐ Produce press kits - final version!
- ☐ Make final arrangements in the room (photo opportunities, sitting arrangement, name tags for speakers, background, and refreshments)

The morning of the press conference:

- ☐ Make final calls to media outlets
- ☐ Check the room thoroughly
- ☐ Rehearse the press conference

During the press conference:

- ☐ Distribute press kits
- ☐ Circulate an attendance list and make sure the present journalists give their contact information
- ☐ Greet the journalists, make introductory remarks and briefly introduce the speakers
- ☐ Speakers continue with short statements then media questions follow
- ☐ Watch the time and always allow enough time for questions
- ☐ Monitor and tape the coverage, take photos for your media archive
- ☐ Say thank you and goodbye
- ☐ Provide information on how to maintain communication and when future press events will take place

After the press conference:

- ☐ Keep on talking to the journalists
- ☐ Organize individual interviews if requested
- ☐ Call the key journalists who did not attend, send them press kits, summarize the main issues raised at the press conference
- ☐ File press conference material in media archive (press clippings, recording, photos), analyze!

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This guide was written for the West Africa Election Observers Network (WAEON) by Julia Brothers and Anastasia Soeryadinata Wibawa, with support from Meghan Fenzel and Ulrike Rodgers.

