



## A Guide to Implementing Media Roundtables

# Introduction to Voices for Healthy Kids

Voices for Healthy Kids®, an initiative of the American Heart Association (AHA) with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), works to create environments that support health so all young people in the United States have access to what they need to grow up healthy and reach their full potential. By engaging, organizing, and mobilizing communities across the country, Voices for Healthy Kids aims to ensure that every child has access to healthy foods and drinks at home and in school, safe streets for biking and walking and safe places to play after school.

This guidebook is designed to help you plan and conduct a media roundtable in your media market in order to help educate members of the media on how the current environment contributes to unhealthy lifestyles, and how policy change can help to create a culture of health for everyone.

Today's environment doesn't look like it did just a few decades ago:

- Our school cafeterias have shifted away from scratch cooking to warming commercial processed foods.
- While we recommend children ages 2 to 18 have no more than one sugary drink per week, children are guzzling more than 30 gallons a year. Deceptive marketing practices from the beverage industry shape kids' preferences and purchases, and therefore, their diets and overall health.
- Nearly 75 percent of the top restaurant chains had sugary drinks on their kids' menus in 2016. Restaurants use marketing to shape children's food preferences and choices, including what kids think of as food. However, a national survey showed more than 80 percent of 8- to 12-year-old children were interested in drinking milk, water, or flavored water instead of soda with their kids' meal.
- Urban sprawl has led to a dependency on travel by automobile, which has contributed to decreased physical activity levels, and fewer children walking and biking to school.
- As more affluent families moved into the suburbs, many neighborhoods and communities were left struggling as businesses – including neighborhood grocery stores and supermarkets – closed urban locations and followed the new middle class from urban to subdivisions. This shift contributed to the lack of access to healthy foods in many areas.
- Families are eating out more than ever these days, given our busy schedules and the growing affordability of restaurant meals. Eating out, which used to be a rare treat has become a daily event. Americans now spend more of their food budget on foods prepared away from home than on foods at home.

States and communities have the ability to reverse these trends and promote opportunities for people to be more physically active and have access to healthier foods. The media can play an important role in helping the public understand the impact the environment around us can have on our health. Often, in order to change the environment, policy change must occur.

Voices for Healthy Kids actively supports policy changes where children live, learn, and play to help kids across the country grow up at a healthy weight. Nearly one in three kids and teens is overweight or obese. While childhood obesity affects the entire country, it does not affect all communities equally. For this reason, Voices for Healthy Kids is committed to reaching communities that are disproportionately impacted by the epidemic:

communities of color; lower-income urban, suburban, and rural populations of all races and ethnicities; and Native Americans.

State and local policy changes are effective strategies to help children lead healthier lives. Public officials have both the right and the responsibility to ensure communities have access to healthy foods and safe places to be active. Our policy priorities to achieve healthier communities are:

- Improving the nutritional quality of snack foods and beverages in schools.
- Improving the quality and amount of time for physical education in schools.
- Reducing consumption of sugary drinks.
- Protecting children from unhealthy food and beverage marketing.
- Increasing access to affordable healthy foods.
- Increasing access to parks, playgrounds, walking paths, bike lanes, and other opportunities to be physically active.
- Ensuring quality standards for nutrition, active play and screen time in early childcare settings.
- Increasing and improving opportunities for kids to stay active when they are out of school.

In this guidebook, you will find tactics, tools, and resources to help you plan your media roundtable. We are excited to offer this resource to support your work in building relationships with journalists, bloggers, and others in the media so they can develop a greater understanding of the complexities surrounding the childhood obesity epidemic.

We encourage you to engage the staff and partners of Voices for Healthy Kids, as well as community coalition members. Stay connected to our work on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [voicesforhealthykids.org/](http://voicesforhealthykids.org/), or reach us directly at [VoicesforHealthyKids@heart.org](mailto:VoicesforHealthyKids@heart.org).

# Media Roundtable Purpose and Overview

Voices for Healthy Kids is committed to increasing the national dialogue on our strategic priorities. We know the media has a powerful role in shaping the national conversation around helping all people grow up at a healthy weight through school, community, policy and industry initiatives. The primary purpose of your media roundtable is to elevate the conversation on policy approaches at the state and local levels to increase access to healthy foods and opportunities for physical activity. By helping the media see the stories and faces behind the public policy change, this dialogue is an opportunity for real people to get emotionally invested in the issues rather than just presenting them with information on why and how we are addressing the issues. Voices for Healthy Kids can provide technical assistance and resources to funded campaigns to ensure this dialogue is happening in key media markets across the country, with the goals to:

1. Educate media on how the environment around us either prevents or enables us to live healthy lives and impacts childhood health.
2. Enable key media to move the conversation from the need for individual behavior change to the need for environmental, systems and policy change.
3. Develop personal relationships with a wide variety of media outlets to increase our reach to all audiences.

In order to achieve these goals, Voices for Healthy Kids staff will work with campaigns to elevate the conversation on ongoing state and community policy work. Following are some key objectives to consider when planning your media roundtable.

## *Short-term Objectives*

- Media roundtables will include 10 to 12 participants representing a diverse group of media outlets (print, local broadcast news, radio, consumer publications, multicultural media outlets) and influential bloggers.
- Advocacy-issue campaign staff or spokesperson will be present at the roundtable to listen and increase their own understanding of media roundtable participants' perspectives.
- Participants will leave with an increased understanding of:
  - a. the impact of the community environment on a child's ability to get adequate physical activity and have a healthy diet;
  - b. how communities can support their role in media to showcase personal stories, community impact, and the need for policy solutions;
  - c. Voices for Healthy Kids blueprint for success to pass policies to improve nutrition and physical activity.

## *Long-term Objectives*

1. Stronger relationships with media outlets as demonstrated by both earned media and strategic collaborative opportunities across your coalition's strategic priorities.
2. Increased opportunities to highlight environmental issues that make it difficult, if not impossible for children to grow up healthy as shown by increased inclusion of our policy priorities to improve nutrition and increase access to physical activity.
3. Increased media coverage and engagement of spokespeople in advocacy media opportunities.

# Logistics and Planning

## Overview

While the outline for the media roundtables may look the same from community to community, each event will have its own distinct personality. Bring a team together to plan this event. In addition to communications and advocacy staff working on the campaign, there may be coalition members or other key stakeholders who should be invited into the planning process.

## Moderators

There are two main roles to be filled by a moderator for this media roundtable. While it is possible to have these two roles in one person, it is unlikely, and it would be more effective with two moderators or co-hosts for your event.

- One is to have a peer-led conversation; therefore, having someone within the media as a moderator can level the playing field in the conversation. You might want to consider a neutral or former media personality for this role.
- The second is to ensure the conversation drives ideas for participants to engage the public in our priority issues. This role is best filled by someone with greater experience with your campaign issues, your community and advocacy. Appropriate people to fill this role may be campaign leadership, a school administrator/teacher, or your campaign spokesperson.

*Select* – There are several factors to consider when selecting the moderator or hosts for this event. As with any moderator, a top priority is someone comfortable in leading a dynamic group discussion, yet willing to yield the floor to participants. Consider the personality, audience appeal and public recognition as you brainstorm the ideal moderator. *If you plan to host a media roundtable with bloggers, make sure your moderator is well-known to the blogging community. This will increase the credibility of the event and the likelihood of their participation.*

*Recruit* – Once you have reached agreement on the ideal moderator or hosts, it's time to make the request and secure the moderator officially. Depending on the relationship with the moderator and someone on your staff or in your coalition, this may be a formal request or an informal request. Either way, it is important to include key points, such as purpose, date and location in your request for them to moderate (see Example Co-Host Invite). If you do not have some of these details determined or are building your event around the moderator's availability, it is important to disclose that up front in your communication.

*Train* – Even though the moderator was selected because of their dynamic personality, ability to lead a group conversation, or strong presence in the community, training for this specific event will ensure your moderator is sufficiently prepared for the expected conversation flow and some potential pitfalls. If you are working with a moderator who has assisted your organization with other events, perhaps as an emcee, it is especially important that they understand that the role they will play during a media roundtable is very different. It is important to schedule two short calls with your moderator(s). The first call should be soon after they have accepted the role to generally brief them on the event and introduce the topics of conversation expected. The second call should be within a week of the event to walk through the details of the agenda, talking points and confirmed participants.

## Timing

Finding the right date for your event can be a challenge. In addition to accommodating the schedule of your speakers, you'll also want to consider holiday schedules and other events happening in your media market. For example, in February, May, July and November, TV stations ramp up their news coverage as they measure their viewership during these months. Because this is an especially busy time for newsroom staff, you should avoid scheduling a media roundtable during these times. Be sure to check your calendar for special days that might be celebrated by religions or cultures other than your own.

You can also look to your calendar to find dates to leverage. If schools in your area go back into session in mid- to late-August, then a late-August or early September date might work well in your market. In addition to people most likely being back from summer vacation, September is National Childhood Obesity Awareness Month. However, if your schools start back after Labor Day, this can be a difficult time to schedule.

You could also leverage other awareness days such as Healthy Eating Day in November or National Walking Day in April. You could place information about other events you are hosting in the media packet or gift bag or attendees.

Bottom line: find the time that is right for your market. If you have capacity to work on the event, if your speakers are available, and if you have been sensitive to events in your community, then you are more likely to have a successful event than if you picked a specific date on the calendar and forced it to work.

While many media roundtables are held over lunch to increase participation, in your market it may be better to host a roundtable at breakfast or another time entirely.

## Location, Location, Location

### *Audience Appeal*

When selecting your location for the media roundtable, consider fun and unusual places that can increase interest in your event. In particular, a new restaurant, park or trendy community gathering spot might build up more excitement for the event than somewhere they have been to on several occasions. The location should also be convenient for media to attend given their schedule.

### *Alignment with Goals*

Equally critical is a venue that aligns with the goals of the American Heart Association and represents the types of issues your campaign is working towards. For example, a farm to table restaurant that will heavily showcase local produce on your menu is a good idea. Another option may be hosting at your local farmer's market, a school that exemplifies your community goals, or at a location adjacent to a community park or walking trail.

### *Private Event Focused*

In order to have a thought-provoking conversation among 10 to 15 individuals, the venue needs to be both comfortable and private. A large dining room with a door that closes off other noises and distractions is particularly helpful. Be sure to visit the venue at the time of day your event will occur to check the noise levels in the meeting space. The caterer should be notified at what points in the conversation you would like the courses brought to the table to minimize distractions.



## Staffing

### *Who Gets In?*

The primary goal of this event is to build relationships and rapport with key media. Therefore, the event should be an intimate gathering of just 10 to 12 people *including you*. While there is opportunity for other staff to welcome the media, once the actual event begins, it is critical to close the door and provide the participants a strong sense of close conversation. It will be up to your team to determine how many people are in the room, but it is highly discouraged to have more than two to three staff sitting to the side.

### *Who does what?*

The basic roles and responsibilities for the event will include a primary greeter, the moderator(s), and someone to take notes. The greeter's goal is to ensure the moderator knows who is in the room and that everyone finds their seat. Taking notes on each participant's comments tremendously helps with follow up and thank you notes, so be sure to have at least one person prepped to take down key takeaways and potential partnership opportunities. In preparation for the event, there is plenty of work to be shared among staff, but not all the staff may make sense to be in the room at the event.

- ✓ Sign venue contract
- ✓ Confirm menu
- ✓ Determine A.V. needs
- ✓ Finalize décor, signage, etc.
- ✓ Finalize attendee photo shot list
- ✓ Request branded materials and stuff gift bags for participants
- ✓ Confirm staffing (on-site & in room)
- ✓ Confirm table set-up
- ✓ Draft pre-luncheon note
- ✓ Finalize evite
- ✓ Determine potential video content
- ✓ Develop discussion guide
- ✓ Finalize seating assignments
- ✓ Update & finalize attendee look book
- ✓ Print notecards
- ✓ Draft thank you note
- ✓ Finalize attendee outreach
- ✓ Reflect & share key takeaways (post-luncheon)



## **Branding/Campaign Alignment**

As mentioned earlier, this is an opportunity to talk about the environment, how it impacts the health of our children, and how policy change can have a positive impact on the ability for all kids to grow up at a healthy weight. While you should take the opportunity to introduce all the policy areas, if your market is currently working on a campaign, or is laying the groundwork for a campaign, your roundtable could dive deeper into that policy lever as an example. By using your campaign as an example, you can educate the media on your initiative while you help to build an understanding of the larger issues.

In addition to sharing materials created for the campaign, this is also an opportunity to highlight other related activities that the coalition members organization may be doing. For example, if talking about a Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) campaign, you might also highlight mobile markets; if you are talking about active transportation, then you could also highlight work of being done by a bicycle organization or environmental group promoting walking and biking; or if you are working on a healthy drinks campaign, you could talk about the Rethink Your Drink education campaign. This can show that the state/community is working in multiple ways to help kids be healthy.

## **Lobbying vs. Non-Lobbying**

It is always important to plan strategically whether your activities will fall under the IRS definition of lobbying. This is especially true with this event because Voices for Healthy Kids wants to save lobbying funds for when we need them most. This event should be easily constructed to be non-lobbying, but you'll want to make sure that staff present – as well as your speakers – understand the rules, and how to respond to a few key situations. Prior to the media roundtable, schedule a call to cover these details. Include your speakers, those staffing the event, your Voices for Healthy Kids staff partner, and our legal counsel, Allen Mattison.

Assuming no legislators are present at your event, a media roundtable will be non-lobbying as long as it does not include language the IRS considers to be a call to action. Generally, a call to action means asking people to contact their legislators; in some situations, it also can include identifying particular legislators or providing their contact information. This means your roundtable speakers and participants may discuss specific legislation – and even say whether the legislature should pass or defeat it – as long as they do not discuss individual legislators. Alternatively, if it is important to discuss individual legislators, the media roundtable must avoid discussion of specific legislative proposals in order to remain a non-lobbying expense. Below are some examples of communications that may be considered lobbying, as well as those that are not.



## **Example Invitation**

This type of digital file can be used for a formal email invite before or after phone calls directly to the invited guests. We can work with you to create an invitation that fits your needs. In developing your invitation, consider including the following information:

- Date
- Time
- Venue name and address
- Event purpose
- RSVP contact
- Moderator
- Website address

## **Participant Outreach and Follow Up**

### **Build your invitation list.**

Since the group of attendees should be kept to a small number – ideally no more than 15 members of the media, you might want to tier your invitation list, and only send to one tier at a time. It is reasonable to expect if you are reaching out to journalists you haven't worked with previously, that only a small percentage will accept. Don't be discouraged!

### **Personally invite media.**

Because you want to maximize your chances of having as many key members of the media in attendance, follow up with a personal phone call – or even a personal visit – to build excitement about the event.

### **Build excitement.**

Make sure they understand this is an exclusive opportunity that you want them to be a part of it.

### **Send reminders.**

Get the commitments early and make sure to send a reminder email or make a reminder call in the days leading up to the event. Be sure to collect cell phone numbers in case you need to reach out the day of the event.

# The Big Event

To create a successful event with a dynamic discussion, your moderator will need a discussion guide that is simple to follow yet provides sufficient detail on the focus of the conversation. Work closely with your Advocacy and Communications teams to determine what will work best for your local news media to transition from discussing individual level changes and personal responsibility to discussing policy change and public health impact. Ask your team to consider the following as you think through the best conversation topics for your community.

- What local story about policy change in your community would best set the stage for this conversation?
- What are the policy priorities we need to bring into the conversation during the roundtable?
- What are some sensitivities we need to be aware of in our community, for our moderator(s) or in the political context locally?
- How will our coalition’s campaign or name, success stories and/or materials be included in this event?
- How should the moderator close the event to set us up for successful follow up?

## Event Timeline and Agenda

A detailed timeline and agenda will help the moderator guide the participants through all topics of interest to your coalition. Be sure to meet with your moderator a few days prior to the event to walk through all your details to ensure all expectations and concerns are addressed in advance of the event. For each in-depth discussion on a policy priority, be sure to discuss your moderator’s perspective and determine if they have any personal experience with this topic that they can share with the group to set the context for conversation. If a personal experience is identified, work with the moderator to develop this story and ensure they set the context for policy and systems changes, not individual behavior change.

### *Example Timeline for Setup*

- 11:30-12:00 Final Setup
- Screen/projector or AV, if needed
  - Participant materials
  - Decorations
- 11:45 Photographer arrives
- 12:15 Luncheon attendees arrive
- 12:15-12:30 Casual meet and greet photos and mingling

### *Participant Materials*

Voices for Healthy Kids can provide your team with a few items to give to participants. However, you may decide you would like to use materials from your local campaign or additional small gifts as a thank you to participants.

## Example Luncheon Structure

### **12:30 – 1:05 Greeting and Logistics**

*Welcome the group, tee up the importance of the subject, its growing role as a topic of media concern, why it's critical that we continue to search for solutions that will turn the epidemic around, and the role of the media; encourage use of social media; explain that this is a multi-way dialogue and we want to hear from all of you as experts.*

### **Participant Introductions (20 min)**

*Ask everyone to introduce themselves and say one change that they would like to see that would help all children eat healthier and be more active. Transition to discussing how some of these ideas are different levels of change and there is need for policy change. Start with a story of a life changed because of a policy change to give the emotional hook. Without a policy change type story, we reinforce personal responsibility. Voices for Healthy Kids can provide select examples that may be used if needed; however, a local story that exemplifies this change is preferred.*

### **1:05 – 1:15 Voices for Healthy Kids Overview**

*Provide brief overview of initiative and progress. Explain the goals of changing policies to ensure schools and communities can provide healthy options for children while also eliminating the striking ethnic and geographic disparities that exist.*

### **1:15 – 2:25 Moderated Discussion**

*Lunch is served quietly while participants address two to three questions tied to our six pillars to facilitate conversation.*

#### **Discussion #1: Policy and System Changes for Smart School Food**

(15-20 minutes)

#### **Discussion #2: Community Solutions to Disparities in Active Places and Food Access**

(25-30 minutes)

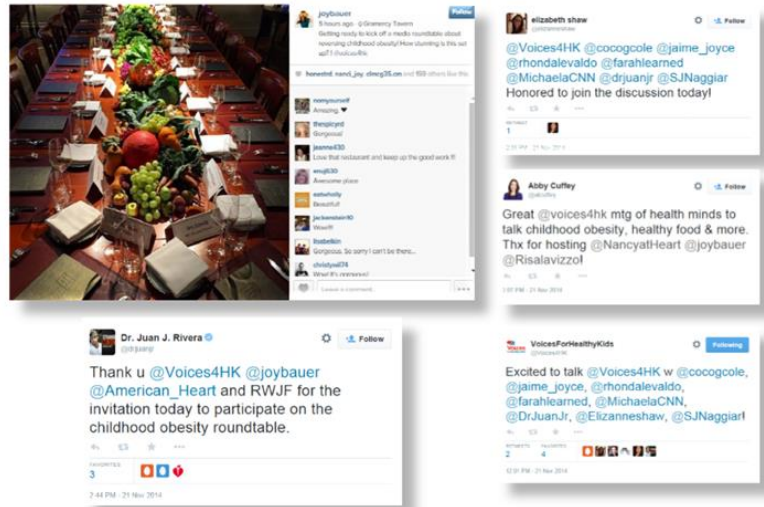
#### **Discussion Point #3: Industry Impact on Healthy Drinks and Food Marketing**

(15-20 minutes)

### **2:25 – 2:30 Thank You and Adjourn**

## Social Media

While the intent of this roundtable is an intimate conversation and not a public discourse, we recommend encouraging use of social media and tagging participants from your campaign to engage with them prior to and after the event. If you decide to use a social media screen, be sure to budget for a screen, Wi-Fi, and putting up the Twitter feed (depending on the app used). Create a specific hashtag for the event, and if you tag @Voices4HK we will retweet you!



# The Real Work Ahead

Your event will only be as successful as your commitment to follow up and building a relationship with each attendee. Each of the participants will require a different strategy for collaboration and/or earned media in the coming months. Some may already have ideas about how they want to work with your coalition in general or might be passionate about kids' health, food access or the built environment. Finding out what drives their personal interests as well as the interests of their media outlets will produce the best results.

## A Note on Thank You Notes

It is recommended that personalized thank you notes come from at least two individuals as part of the initial follow up. The first is a handwritten note from the moderator(s) and can be a quick and simple note to extend their gratitude and excitement. The second is a direct connection made with the coalition staff that will be building the relationship. This communication should include a request for a follow up meeting to discuss topics or ideas of interest to that media outlet or reporter.

Example for Moderator's Note:

Thank you for joining us at Friday's Voices for Healthy Kids luncheon roundtable! We truly appreciated you sharing your thoughts on [subject A e.g. improving access to healthy foods] and [subject B e.g. addressing marketing of unhealthy foods to children].

In this season of thanksgiving, we extend our sincere gratitude for the passion and creativity you brought to our conversation last Friday. It is what will be needed to achieve the progress required to help every child grow up at a healthy weight and live a long, healthy life. We look forward to working with you in telling the stories of how we'll get there.

## News Story Ideas

Once you have determined an issue or story of high interest to each of your media participants, make plans to meet them in person if possible. Solidifying your relationship based on *their* interest will provide you the open door you need to discuss other ideas for stories on your policy priorities and the underlying personal stories on policy change. Some ideas for stories that may work for your community, depending on your policy priorities and current environment are below.

### Food Access

*Increasing access to affordable healthy foods*

- A family that now has access to healthier foods because a local corner store or grocer added healthier options.
  - Prefer that the owner reaped benefits in both revenue and customers.
  - Or a grocer that intentionally located in a low-income community and successfully sold healthy foods.

- A “scavenger hunt” for healthy recipe ingredients in a neighborhood without a grocery store.

### **Active Places**

*Increasing access to parks, playgrounds, walking paths, bike lanes and other opportunities to be physically active:*

- A parent that feels confident about the safety of their child that walks or bikes to school because of the infrastructure in place.
- A group or family that plays/uses facilities at a school on the weekends/evenings because the school has a shared use agreement in place.
- A family in a neighborhood that is now able to get out and get active because of new sidewalks or bike lanes.
- A “walk to school” tour with a family who lives in a neighborhood without sidewalks, crosswalks or other features that would make it safe for kids to walk or bike to school.

### **Healthy Drinks**

*Reducing consumption of sugary drinks:*

- A family that is working to reduce the amount of sugary drinks but struggles with consistently making the healthy choice.
  - Or an adult that struggled with weight as a child/teen until they cut back on sugary drinks and are now actively doing something in the community related to reducing sugary drink consumption.
- A government facility that changed what was in its vending machines to healthy drink options and saw positive results.
- A school district that used water jets or coolers in the cafeteria to encourage water consumption and saw an increase in consumption.
  - Would want a story on a child that made the switch from SSB to water outside of school because of this policy/system change.
- Tour of existing health programs that could be expanded with the revenue from a sugary drink tax.