**How To Get Media Coverage of Your Grand Jury Reports**

Media attention is as important to civil grand jury reports as proven facts, proper findings, and helpful recommendations.

News stories about grand jury reports inform the public about important issues and put pressure on local elected officials to implement the grand jury’s recommendations aimed at improving the performance of governmental entities. Like the civil grand jury, the media is a government watchdog that can provide a powerful megaphone for amplifying the grand jury’s messages. Heightened public awareness of grand jury investigations also can help with recruiting as some people are not likely to volunteer unless their work is taken seriously.

Media attention is so important that the Civil Grand Jurors’ Association of California gives an annual Excellence in Reporting Award to a member of the media for their news stories on grand jury reports.

The keys to shining the media spotlight on jury reports are planning, organization, and timing. Timing reports to be released individually rather than publishing all reports in a single consolidated report is the best way to get media coverage and the public attention that each jury report deserves.

**Develop a Media Strategy**

Civil grand juries should consider appointing an individual juror or a committee to be responsible for media relations. They should establish and annually update a media contact list with the email addresses of the managing editors of all media outlets within their county so that reports can be sent directly to them as soon as they are released. The media contact list should be passed on to the successive jury. The grand jury can also consider using social media to publicize the jury’s reports.

The jury should prepare or update a template for their press releases about newly released reports. (See Press Release, posted on CGJA’s website under Jury Resources, Sample Documents, Processing and Releasing Reports.)

**Release Reports Individually**

A report that is released individually has a much better chance of getting media coverage than a report that is bundled into an annual consolidated final report with all of the other grand jury reports.

Imagine a news reporter working on deadline with no more than a few hours or days to write a story. With an individually released report, this journalist can quickly focus on the report’s summary, findings, and recommendations. They have more time to absorb the report contents and make calls and get reactions from responding agencies. With a good grand jury topic, this journalist can produce a strong story that has a decent chance of making the front page.

In contrast, the journalist who is given an annual compilation of all the jury’s reports has a harder job. To make their deadline, this reporter has to quickly sort, read, and understand **all** the reports in the consolidated report. With deadlines looming, they are likely to focus only on those reports that they believe have the best news value. There is no way that all jury reports are going to get equal attention. In fact, some reports may not get mentioned at all.

All reports that merit a year of jury investigation, writing, and editing deserve media coverage and public attention. To work on a report that gets no media coverage has to be dispiriting for the jurors. Releasing all jury reports individually gives each of them an equal opportunity for an important moment in the media spotlight.

**Time the Release of Your Reports**

Individually releasing reports requires planning. Otherwise, a jury may find itself releasing all or most if its reports at the very end of the year. In that case, it will be up to the journalists to decide which reports to cover. This can be avoided.

By midway through its term, a grand jury will have a good idea of what reports it expects to produce. This is the point when the jury should tentatively assign a separate target release date for each report. Target dates should be separated by at least a week so that the media has the time to properly absorb and produce a quality news story for each report.

To hit their target dates, the jury should call on each investigative committee to produce a timeline for finishing their report. Using an Project Management Plan (posted on CGJA’s website under Jury Resources, Sample Documents, Investigations), investigating committees can work backwards from a report due date to target ending dates for judicial review, exit interviews, county counsel review, plenary approval, editorial review, report writing, and investigation. Circumstances will change and dates on the timelines will shift as the year progresses. These timelines should be reviewed periodically by the full jury when it is looking at the progress of each investigative committee.

By developing and sticking to a plan for releasing each of its reports individually, a jury can optimize media coverage and generate broad public awareness of all of its reports. This should help to foster support for its recommendations for improving local government.