

Writing a press release and pitching it to the media



Writing a press release can help you to get media coverage of your organisation or campaign. Media coverage can raise awareness of your work, the profile of your organisation or encourage people to get involved in some way such as signing a petition or using your services.

What is a press release?

A press release (or news release/ media release) is a written summary of your story for the media. It will include the key facts, quotes from spokespeople and contact details for more information. The main role of a press release is to convince the media to cover your story but the media may also publish content directly from your press release. Journalists receive many press releases every day so lots of them are ignored – your press release will need to be exciting and relevant for it to stand out.

Why write a press release?

Writing a press release can be cheaper and more effective than spending money on advertising. The media have no responsibility to promote you, so you may need to convince them to cover your story. Writing a press release is a good idea because:

- **It's the best format to get your story to the media** – a press release brings all the key facts together and shows journalists how your story might work on their programme or publication.
- **It will help you to get your story straight** – a press release will help you to work out what you want to say and provide a brief for anyone giving a radio or TV interview.
- **It will provide content ready for you and the media to use** – journalists may use content straight from your press release – this is great as it means you can have as much influence over the story as possible. You can publish content from the press release on your own channels such as your website and newsletters.

When should you write a press release?

It's a good idea to send press releases out regularly to maximise your chances of getting coverage – aim for at least four times a year. You can write a press release about almost anything – as long as your story is “newsworthy”, this means worthy of being in the news. If you send out lots of press releases that aren't relevant or interesting, you will quickly get a reputation for wasting journalists' time.

Before writing a press release ask yourself:

- **Is it new?** The word 'news' means 'new things' after all. The launch of a new project is not news in itself, but if it is being launched in response to a growing trend in society, it might just be news.
- **Is it unusual?** Does your story challenge expectations or surprise?
- **Is it interesting or significant?** It's got to be relevant to a lot of people not just your members or supporters. Does it relate to a high-profile issue currently in the news?
- **Is it about people?** Does it impact on people's lives? Do you have 'real people' who can bring your story to life?
- **Is it relevant to the media you are targeting?** Is it on their patch and tailored to their audience – geographically, demographically or in terms of topic?
- **Is it easy to understand?** Your story must be clear and focused – if the journalist can't understand it, their audience won't either.

How to write a press release

You should write a press release in the 'inverted pyramid' structure – see diagram below. This means giving the full gist of your story and the most newsworthy content at the start and adding extra details further down. This is because you need to get the attention of journalists with the most interesting information first. Also, when stories are cut down due to lack of space, editors will cut from the bottom upwards so you don't want to save the most important information to the end.



Top tips for great press releases

Do:

- Write it as a news story in the style of the media you want to cover your story
- Keep the media's readers/viewers/listeners in mind too – what will interest and persuade them?
- Keep your paragraphs short – no more than 5 lines each
- Use simple, everyday language – 'big' not 'sizeable'
- Provide facts not opinion – don't say it is an 'amazing project' – provide facts that show this
- Offer journalists extra content such as: interviews, photos, videos.

Don't:

- Make it too long – aim to get the press release on one page
- Use jargon (for example Level 2 staff) or acronyms (for example NSPCC) – these could confuse people
- Try to say too much – focus on the main elements of the story
- Make your spokesperson's quote boring: it should add something to the release and should be focused on the needs of your target audience – avoid "we are delighted"
- Fill up your press release with history and background details: you can use the 'notes to editors' section for this
- Send your press release as an attachment – paste it into the body of your email, this is quicker for journalists and means your email is less likely to be blocked.

10 steps to writing a press release

Follow these 10 simple steps to develop your own press release. On the next page you will see each step put into practice in an example press release.

1. **Label** – clearly label it with ‘press release’ and the date you are publishing it
2. **Headline** – summarize your story in one sentence – make it sound as interesting as possible but a clear description is the most important thing as journalists will want to judge whether the story is relevant to their audience
3. **First paragraph** – tell the main facts of the story – who, what, why, where, when, how, and make sure you mention why it is newsworthy e.g. an event happening this Friday, new research published today
4. **Second and third paragraphs** – expand on your story with more information and facts and figures
5. **Comments** – provide a view from a spokesperson – someone relevant in your organisation (could be your director or a project manager) and a view from someone external (could be a VIP, a customer/ service user, a partner organisation)
6. **Closing paragraph** – talk about what might happen next and say if there is anything you hope people will do such as signing up to your service, attending an event or making a donation etc. Don’t forget to include any relevant public contact details such as your web address, Facebook and Twitter profiles and any hashtags (#) you are using on social media
7. **Ends** – write ‘ends’ in bold to clearly show the end of the content for publication
8. **Notes to editors** – include a ‘notes to editors’ section with bullet points providing background information for journalists such as information about available photos, link to a research report, a brief biography of a key spokesperson etc.
9. **Contact for more information** – include a phone number and email address for journalists – this should usually be the first bullet point in the ‘notes to editors’ section
10. **Boilerplate** – this is a short “about us” paragraph that explains your organisation or project and its history and includes details like your web address

Label HEADLINE
First paragraph
SECOND AND THIRD PARAGRAPHS
Comments Closing paragraph
Ends Notes to editors
Contact for more information
Boilerplate

Press release example

1. PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

Tuesday 25 April 2017

2. New community bus service will connect 3,000 villagers

3. A volunteer-run bus service will provide a vital transport link for 3000. An hourly minibus to xxx town centre and train station will transform the lives of non-drivers in the village including elderly, disabled and young people as well as encouraging walkers and tourists.

4. The idea of the xxx Community Bus came out of a Parish Council consultation which found that residents felt that poor public transport links were one of the worst aspects of living in the village. Mick Hamilton, a retired train driver believed that if funding for a minibus could be found, village residents could step in as volunteer bus drivers.

In September 2016 funding for a minibus was successfully raised from the Rural Connections Foundation. A call for volunteer drivers went out in the village and a team of 12 all went on to successfully pass their minibus licence test. The first bus will depart from the village square at 8am this coming Monday (1st May). A return fare to xxx will cost £2.50.

5. Mick Hamilton, founder of the bus service and volunteer driver said:

"We can't believe how quickly the idea of a community bus for xxx has become a reality. I had my doubts about all our volunteers passing the minibus test but no-one let us down! Our volunteer team includes a 22-year-old and a 69-year-old and our shifts vary from three hours to two days. I will be driving the first service with huge pride. We hope as many of the village's 3,000 residents as possible will turn up to cheer us off!"

Jane Sanders, aged 82, resident of xxx, said:

"Since I lost my husband in 2013 I rarely leave the village because I can't drive and I can't justify the expense of a taxi too often. I simply can't wait to try out the new bus service and to visit the shops in xxx. I think the bus service will make a huge difference to anyone who can't drive in the village as well as bringing tourists in."

6. The xxx Community Bus timetable and information on volunteering and donating can be found at www.xxxcommunitybus.org.uk. If you would like to volunteer as a driver or use the service please get in touch with the team.

7. **Ends.**

8. **Notes to editors:**

9. For media requests, interviews and photos please contact Sarah-Louise Prince at email@xxxcommunitybus.org.uk or call her on 0XXXX XXXXXX.

10. The xxx Community Bus Charity was founded in April 2016 to provide a bus service from the village of xxx to the town of xxx. The 15-seater minibus was bought following a successful funding bid to Rural Connections Foundation which also paid for the charity's 12 initial volunteer drivers to take their minibus licence tests. The upkeep, insurance and fuel costs of the minibus will be met through fares. The charity anticipates needing a constant stream of new volunteers willing to take on a minimum of one three-hour shift a week as well as ongoing funding to pay for minibus licence tests and the running of the bus. To see the bus timetable, make a donation or to find out more about volunteering please visit www.xxxcommunitybus.org.uk

What do the media want?

- **Great stories** – the media is always looking for stories that will capture their audience’s attention. Do you have anything surprising, shocking, inspirational or wacky to say? Can you offer “human interest” by showing how people are affected? Try focusing on the story of someone who has taken part in your project or campaign.
- **Relevance** to the news agenda – news stories must be timely and up-to-the-minute. Can you link your story to a current issue in the news? Or is there a link to a calendar date such as Christmas or Father’s Day?
- **Quick turnaround** – journalists are often under pressure to meet their deadlines. If you can make their life easier, your story will be more likely to get a bigger splash. Get back to journalists quickly and provide content such as photos and people to interview.

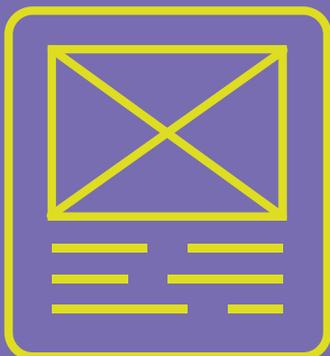
Which media should you target?

Think about the people you want to reach. What media do they read/watch/listen to? This is where you need to get your story covered. If you want to target people in a regional area you will want to get in touch with media covering that region. For example if you are running a programme for families in the area, a local parent’s magazine may run a bigger story and reach more of the right people than a local newspaper.

How to get your press release out

You should email your press release out to any media you would like to cover your story and that you think might be likely to run it. Find journalists’ contact details by:

- Looking on their website/ publication/ programme
- Calling their office
- Contacting them via social media
- Using a media directory – there are some free ones such as www.journalisted.com or Gorkana, Cision and Meltwater are paid-for services
- Use your own channels to get your press release out as widely as possible. Publish your press release on your website and promote it via social media and newsletters and ask other people to share it.



Media Trust

Ugll Campus
56 Wood Lane
London W12 7SB

Keep in touch

Email: info@mediatrust.org
Twitter: @Media_Trust
Facebook: www.facebook.com/MediaTrustCharity
Tel: +44 207871 5600

Media Trust is a registered charity: 1042733
Company Number: 2895790