

GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

Three basic rules to follow:

01. Know your news
02. Know the most likely opportunities with different media sources
03. Convey your news in a way that's attractive and easy for the media to use.

01. Know your news.

This is important because it helps you gain additional media coverage and attention on an ongoing basis and helps keep the community engaged in what you do. Even if it merits a small mention, your news keeps you in the forefront of the community's consciousness, helping your current and new audiences engage with your organization, and reminding donors of the impact of donations.

Examples of possible news to report:

- New funding (yes!)
- New facilities or renovations or websites
- New programs
- New personnel
- Special events
- Special concerns
- Special stories

The latter two can especially be fodder for extensive coverage, as the media is always looking for a good story and will often cover at some length community concerns raised by non-profit groups. You can convey your news through a release or by speaking with an editor or reporter. However, most media prefer something in writing, such as an email outlining the topic. If you do send in a release, it helps to follow up with a phone call to the media you are most interested in to ensure it was noticed or directed to the right department. If there is no interest, you might ask why.

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02. Know the most likely opportunities with different media sources.

- Construct an area database of various print, TV and radio media that handle the kind of news you have. Record contact information for each, especially emails.
- Note broadcast interview shows that let you directly speak to the public about your organization and project.
- Note smaller papers or outlets like “The Paper” that may print your release verbatim.

03. Convey your news in a way that’s attractive and easy for the media to understand and use.

We are living in an age of visual communications, where more and more people are getting information visually rather than through the printed word. Accordingly, it helps to think a bit visually about conveying what you want to say.

- For the printed word, having a good photograph or link to a brief video to send along with a release can improve your odds of getting coverage by instantly helping an editor or reporter “see” what you’re talking about. A strong photo is also an attention-grabber that can give the publication a way to make your report more attractive to readers on their printed page or web, whether they use your photo or whether it inspires them to take their own.
- Movement, color, and audio are attractive for TV newscasts. Make clear in your release or other communications what will be happening in this regard, whether it be a special part or a news conference (the latter is more of an animation challenge, but it can be done). And, of course, this works well for videos you can shoot and post on your website and report about them.
- For releases, use easy-to-read fonts, 1.5 line spacing, and short paragraphs. Break up copy with subheads if it goes to any length. Use an attractive but not overly promotional logo or header.
- Write well, in news style. News style is more of a problem for for-profit businesses, but it’s a matter of letting the facts (in a persuasive arrangement) make your case in a third-party voice that sounds more credible than an excessive use of superlatives or adjectives.

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- Lead with your core fact and message and report in concise sentences with tight transitions from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph, with all your key information coming as early as possible in the release. You need to immediately grab the reader's interest and quickly pull them through the release. Edit any sentence that is not instantly clear or could in any way slow the reader. A typical editor will take only a few seconds to glance at your headline and first couple paragraphs before deciding if it is worth his or someone else's further attention.
- The contact person is a key part of a release. This should be a person who is knowledgeable about the release topic and is able to concisely explain the release and readily answer questions. The person should be able to quickly respond to phone calls and emails, obtain further information, and set up interviews the reporter might want.

If you have questions, contact:

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