

NATIONAL
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Writing a news release

Tips for community groups about writing and sending a news release

Local news coverage can be useful for your group. It can help you to reach people who might want to get involved. It can also be very powerful if you are campaigning on a particular issue and want to draw attention to your concerns.

In order to get news coverage, you need to send a well written story to local papers, websites, radio stations and TV broadcasters. This is called a news release. Send good photographs to accompany it.

Making your news release interesting, easy to read and well-timed can make a huge difference to the likelihood of your story being covered.

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Writing your news release

Journalists and editors receive dozens of news releases every day. You need to grab their attention right at the beginning and make it easy for them to get all the information they need quickly by skimming through your news release. They are also more likely to use your story if they don't need to change much, so it needs to be interesting and clear enough to appeal to readers of newspapers and websites.

Snappy heading

Start with a short heading that explains why the story is interesting and important. Use a large font size, and bold type. Do not underline it, and do not use capital letters – these things make text harder to read quickly.

Try to write a heading that will be easy to understand for someone who knows nothing about the subject. It must explain what the story is about in an exciting way but should not be too long. Here are three examples of headings for the same story:

- ♦ **Anytown LAT submits petition about traffic congestion**
 - ◇ This heading is hard for the reader to understand, because it contains an acronym, "LAT". It would be better to say "Local Action Team". In addition, it does not explain why the issue of traffic congestion is an issue the reader should care about.

- ♦ **A local group in Anytown has submitted a petition to the local council's Transport committee about our concerns about traffic congestion in the area, because of high levels of asthma and road accidents.**
 - ◇ This heading is too long. It contains too many small, joining words that don't need to be there. A heading doesn't need to be a full sentence. It also contains too much detail (e.g. it is not necessary to say "the local council's Transport committee" – you could just say "council" and provide the rest of the detail in the news release below.)
- ♦ **Anytown residents fight for cleaner air and safer roads**
 - ◇ This heading explains exactly what the story is about, and why it is important. It is short and easy to read, and does not rely on the reader having any existing knowledge about your group or the issue.

First paragraph

Put the key, interesting information in the first paragraph. You want the reader to know what the story is about from the first few sentences. You can do this by using the "Five Ws".

- ♦ **Who** is the story about?
- ♦ **What** is happening?
- ♦ **Why** is it happening?
- ♦ **When** is it happening?
- ♦ **Where** is it happening?

Add interesting details, facts and quotes

Provide some more detail about the things you have already summarised in the heading and first paragraph.

Try to think of things about your story that will make local people want to care about it. Spell them out even if they seem obvious to you.

For example, if you are campaigning for better park facilities, explain that children in the neighbourhood do not have anywhere close by to play, and that this is bad for their health. Provide a statistic or fact that shows playing outside is important for children. (Not too many statistics though – they can get dull!) Explain that improved park facilities will help to improve the health of local families.

Include quotes from named people. This will make your story lively and interesting.

For example, get a quote from a parent about the fact that their children have nowhere local to play outdoors, and how this is impacting on their lives. This is far more powerful than long lists of statistics! Also include a short quote from a member of your group, explaining why the issue matters.

It is very important to get all your facts right. If you are not sure, check. Never make things up or exaggerate the truth. Do not say any negative things about people unless you can definitely prove they are true. (Writing negative things that are not true is called libel, and you can be taken to court for it.)

Write in a clear, concise style

Follow these guidelines to help you.

- ♦ Keep it simple, and concentrate on the main points.

- ♦ Keep it brief – no more than 500 words (one sheet of A4).
- ♦ Try to write sentences of no more than 15-20 words, and only put one point in each sentence.
- ♦ Use everyday language. Don't use technical words, abbreviations, or jargon.
- ♦ Write in the third person – i.e. write it as though you are not involved in the group. Say "They" rather than "We". This will enable the journalist to use your text word-for-word. Use quotes when you want to say "we" or "I".
- ♦ Use direct language – e.g. say "Mary Jones said" rather than "the meeting was then addressed by Mary Jones".
- ♦ Make it active and confident. Say "The petition will be presented to the council" rather than "It is hoped that when we have sufficient names on our petition it will be possible to present it to the council".

Contact details, photo opportunities and notes for the editor

At the end, include a section which will not be published, giving key information to the journalist or editor. Include:

- ♦ Names and contact numbers for someone in your group who is available for interview. Make sure someone will be available in the evenings as well as daytimes.
- ♦ Any extra background detail to give the story context, such as a bit of information about your group, or the history of your campaign. Give this the title "Notes for the editor". Keep it brief!
- ♦ Details of any photo opportunities with times and places. Ask them to come when your event will look its best, or when most people will be there. (Bear in mind that the press rarely send photographers these days, so you should be prepared to take your own photos and send them in as soon as possible, with another news release.)

Check it through

When you have written your news release, have a break and then read it again.

Have you put the most important information in the first paragraph? Have you got a snappy heading? Is it clear and easy to read?

Ask somebody to read through it to check it all makes sense, and to correct any spelling or grammatical errors.

Sending your news release

Most news releases are now sent by email. See our information on local media contacts¹ for ideas of where to send your news release. News desks and journalists receive hundreds of emails each day, so you need to make sure yours stands out and is easy for the journalist to use.

- ♦ Put the heading of your news release in the subject line of the email.

¹ www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information/local-media-contacts

- ♦ Paste your news release into the main body of the email (including the heading again). Don't send it as an attachment, as the journalist might just delete it without reading it at all.
- ♦ Put clear spaces between the paragraphs to make it easier to read.
- ♦ If you have a good quality photograph save it as a .jpg (JPEG file) and attach it to the email. Provide a caption for it at the bottom of your email.
- ♦ Write 'ENDS' at the end of the release, and then put contact details, photo opportunities/details and any notes for the editors.

Getting the timing right

Think about when you want the media to receive your news release.

- ♦ Think about whether you can tie your press release to a big issue or story. For example, if there is a national day of action or national awareness month related to your campaign, think about sending your press release at that time, to make it more relevant to current news.
- ♦ You can send two news releases for an event – one in advance, and one during or after the event, with details of what has happened.
- ♦ With an advance news release send it a week or so before the event. Bear in mind publication days if it is a weekly paper.
- ♦ If you are sending a news release during or after an event it has to be done on the day the event takes place. It won't be news in 2 days' time.
- ♦ Try to find out when the deadlines are for your local press. For example, your local paper probably has a time each evening by which the next day's news must be ready.

Following up on your news release

Follow up your news release with a phone call to the news desk or journalist.

- ♦ If possible, read over your news release and any background information first. Think about the 2 or 3 main points you want to get across.
- ♦ Be polite but firm.
- ♦ Introduce yourself: "Hello, I am (*name*) from (*organisation*). I emailed a press release to you on (*date*) about (*subject*). I wanted to check you have received it, and whether you would like any more information."
- ♦ You will frequently be asked to send the email again. Ask for the name, number and email of the person you are speaking to, and email them immediately before they forget about your phone call.
- ♦ Weekly and monthly publications will have a deadline day when all their material must be ready. This will be a very busy time, so if possible, find out when it is and avoid calling on this day.

Alternatively, they may contact you for more information:

- ♦ Think about what questions they might ask you, and how you can use these to say the things that you want to say.

- ♦ It is always good to have personal stories or accounts, as these make the story more human and interesting. Jot down a few examples, (make sure you have permission from the individuals involved).
- ♦ When you are talking to the reporter, keep a copy of the news release and any background material close at hand so you can refer to it easily.
- ♦ If they call at a difficult time, or you just want a few minutes to compose yourself, ask for their number and call back in ten minutes.
- ♦ Never say anything to a journalist that you don't want to see in print.

Sample news release

Email Subject:

News release: Families reclaim dangerous road as play area for local children

Email body:

News release: Families reclaim dangerous road as play area for local children

A rat-run will become a fun-run on Sunday 7th August, when Busyroad Tenants Association will hold a kids' Fun Day. Speedy Hill and DeathTrap Road will be closed to traffic and transformed into a playground. Picnic tables and a bouncy castle will take the place of lorries and cars.

100 children aged under 16 live in Speedy Hill and DeathTrap Road, with a further 400 in the surrounding area. "This is a fun day, but we also have a serious point to make" said Mary Jones, the secretary of the Association. "There have been 3 serious accidents in the area in the last 5 years. We need traffic calming measures, and safe play areas for our children."

Busyroad Tenants Association have been campaigning for traffic calming measures for over a year. In January 2018 the group submitted a petition to the council containing over 4,000 signatures from local residents. The petition demanded zebra crossings and lower speed limits. Zainab Ahmed, a local parent, said "I just want to know my children are safe when they leave the front door. At the moment I feel like it is too risky to let them play on the estate. This means they don't get enough fresh air, and it really worries me. The fun day will be a chance for them to enjoy being outside in their local area".

The fun day will take place on National Street Party Day, when people all over the country will be closing their streets to cars and opening them up to people.

ENDS

Photo opportunity

A children's parade will take place at 2pm.

For further information contact:

- ♦ Mary Jones, 07777 654321, maryjones@busyroadta.org.uk
- ♦ Ben Miles, 07889 654321, benmiles@busyroadta.org.uk

Notes to the editor

Busyrroad Tenants Association has been running for nearly 10 years, and was set up to help improve the lives of people living on the estate. In January this year we submitted a petition to the council for traffic calming measures on the estate. The council have informed us that they are considering the issue, but no action has been taken.

National Street Party Day is organised by the National Street Party Campaign, 01234 567890.

More information

For more help with getting media coverage, see our information sheets on:

- ♦ *Radio and TV Interviews*
- ♦ *Media Contacts*
- ♦ *State Your Case*