

Association of Scottish Community Councils



# Press Releases

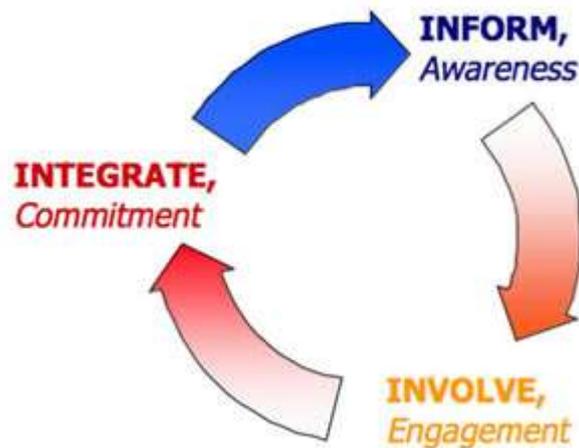
Written Communications Tool Kit

## Introduction

Press releases can respond to a recent development or announce a position, provide context and background information for breaking news, and announce a newsworthy event that the press can be invited to cover. They give the basic who, what, why, when, how and where and, with relative ease and little expense, they have the potential to reach a wide circulation through print and electronic media.

## Definition

A statement or story an organisation prepares and distributes to the news media.



# Essentials

Press releases provide reporters with information they need so they can decide whether and how to cover a story. The information given to reporters should be legitimately newsworthy and mark important milestones in a group's activities and programs.

To help ensure that news about a project gets noticed and results in media coverage, consider the following:

- Identify the news organisations that are most likely to be interested and write the release so it addresses their interests and audiences.
- Consider the effect the announcement may have on the audiences of the news organisations that receive the release, and place the announcement within the context of trends or developments that affect the target audience.
- Assemble several approved quotes from an organisation's leaders or a well-known personality associated with the project to have on hand for writing releases in a hurry.
- Time releases for Monday mornings which is generally best; Fridays are the worst days for most news organisations.
- Don't be discouraged if press releases are not always used. Many reporters save them for a future story or pass them on to other writers that they think might be interested.

# How It Works

## **1. Create a Strong Media Contact List**

Long before submitting anything for coverage, establish a strong rapport with news staff. Create a contact list that includes all relevant reporters, columnists, editors, news directors, assignment editors and talk show hosts at all citywide, regional and community newspapers and television and radio stations. To make the list, find a friendly local organisation or local government agency for its press list. Other tactics are to scan the local yellow pages and call every media outlet listed or consult a national media directory such as Bacon's directories or News Media Yellow Book.

## **2. Identify a Newsworthy Event**

Such examples include the initial formation of a group or coalition, when an important new organisation or public official supports the cause, or when a major public event is being organized such as a rally or town meeting.

## **3. Don't Bury the Lead!**

Summarize what's most important—called the lead—in the first paragraph. It should capture the most essential information and tempt the reader further. Then answer the basic who, what, why, how and where. Leave the least important information for the end so it can be edited if need be. The story should be to one- to two-pages, double-spaced.

#### **4. Format it Like a Pro**

- Put it on letterhead.
- Include date of issue and time of release (usually "immediate").
- Give a contact person and phone number in the top right hand corner so a reporter can follow up for questions or to conduct an interview.
- Put a brief heading on the top of the page; repeat the heading in shortened form on top of succeeding pages.
- Briefly and clearly state the organisation's name and purpose at the end of the release.

#### **5. A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words**

Include a photo that illustrates the project or activity that you are announcing, accompanied by a descriptive caption.

#### **6. Send the Release**

Three to five days before a story should be published in a daily newspaper and up to two weeks before a weekly paper, send the release—either by mail, fax, or email. Send it to one contact, preferably someone who has covered the organisation or project before. Never send the same release to two different people at the same television or radio station or newspaper.



## **7. Follow Up**

Don't sit back and wait to see if the story appears. Follow up with a telephone call whether the release was mailed, emailed or faxed.

## **When to Use**

- You need free publicity for your organisation.
- You need to let the public know about an event.
- You need to reach a wide audience to increase awareness about your project.

## **Not Recommended If....**

- You are expecting press releases account to cover all public communication. Press releases should not be used indiscriminately and routinely. If they are sent too often, the media will start to ignore them.
- You want to reach a small or targeted audience.
- You are looking for a way express your own opinion. Emphasise facts, not opinions unless as quotes from someone else's mouth. Consider writing an Op-Ed piece if you want to argue a specific viewpoint.
- You are expecting a windfall of publicity. Time of day (if a newscast), the page the article appears on (if a newspaper), and length of story all affect whether or not the audience sees the article or hears the story, and how effective it is.