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We also have Resource Centre
information sheets on:
Radio Interviews,
Media Contacts,
and State Your Case

News Release

Tips on writing a news release

Local publicity can be useful for your group. News of your successes or activities can let people know what you are doing, and help you to get new members. Radio or press coverage can also be useful if you are campaigning on a particular issue, and want to draw attention to your concerns.

Journalists are busy. If you can provide them with a well written story at the right time (with pictures if you have them) there is a good chance that they will use it.

This sheet gives tips on how to write a good news release.

Getting the content right

When people read newspapers they do not read everything. They scan through, then read the beginning of a story. If they are interested they will carry on reading. If not, they will skip to the next story. To grab their attention you need to put the key information in your first paragraph. This is often called the 5 W's.

WHAT - what is being done?
WHO - who will be doing it?
WHEN - when will they be doing it?
WHERE - where will they be doing it?
WHY - why will they be doing it?

You can then fill in the rest of the information in your following paragraphs, following these guidelines:

- ★ Keep it simple, and concentrate on the main points.
- ★ Keep it brief - one A4 sheet is best.
- ★ Keep it waffle free. Try to write sentences of no more than 10 words and only put one idea in each sentence.
- ★ Use everyday language. *Don't* use technical words, abbreviations, legalistic or academic jargon.
- ★ Use direct language - e.g. 'Mary Jones said' not 'the meeting was then addressed by Mary Jones'.
- ★ Make sure your story is about people - how will people benefit from what you are doing?



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- ★ Include a quote from a named person. Quotes make it lively and interesting, and can be used to express opinions. Make sure you have covered the 5 W's before you put in the quote.
- ★ Make it active. 'The petition will be presented to our MP...' instead of: 'It is hoped that when we have sufficient names on our petition we will be able to arrange to present it to our MP...'
- ★ Work on your angle. Why will local people be interested in your story?
- ★ Get your facts right. If you aren't sure - check.
- ★ Always give names and contact numbers. Make sure someone will be available in the evening as well as daytime.
- ★ At the bottom of the news release give 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.
- ★ If you want to include some background information put it right at the end of the news release with the heading 'Notes for editors'.
- ★ When you have written your news release, have a break, 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 check and proofread your press release to make sure it is clear without any grammatical or spelling mistakes.

Sending your news release

Most news releases are now sent by email. News desks receive hundreds of emails each day so you need to make sure yours is clear, easy for the journalist to use, and stands out.

- ★ Put the heading of your news release in the subject line of the email.
For example: 'Press release: Busyroad residents turn dangerous road into play area'.
- ★ Paste your news release into the main body of the email. Don't send it as an attachment.
- ★ Put clear spaces between each paragraph 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.

For details of local press contacts see our 'Media Contacts' information sheet



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Getting the timing right

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

- ★ You can send two news releases: one in advance, and one after the event, with details of what has happened. If you are lucky, you may get coverage twice.
- ★ With an advance news release send it to the News Desk 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 after an event it *has* to be done on the day. It won't be news in 2 days' time.
- ★ Papers, TV and radio all have deadlines, which they won't break for your story.
- ★ If speed is important, email or fax the news release.
- ★ If you want to let the press know in advance about an event, but don't want the event publicised until a certain date, you can use an 'embargo'. This means writing 'embargoed until 3pm, 25th December' on your news release. Don't use this unless you really need to.

Getting your response right

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

- ★ 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*). Please could I speak to the journalist who is covering this story."
- ★ 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.

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 - and journalists like this. Jot down a few examples.
- ★ When you are talking to the reporter, keep a copy of the news release and any background material close at hand so you can

For information on radio and press interviews see our 'Radio Interviews' information sheet

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refer to it easily.

- ★ If they ring at a difficult time, or you just want a few minutes to compose yourself, ask for their number and ring back in ten minutes.
- ★ Never say anything to a journalist that you don't want to see in print.

Sample press release

Email 'Subject': **Press release: Busyroad residents turn dangerous road into play area**

News release: For immediate use

CHILDREN RECLAIM THE STREET

A rat-run will become a fun-run on Sunday 7th August, when Busyroad Estate Tenants Association 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 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. "Traffic in Busyroad Estate is fast, constant and heavy. We need traffic calming measures, and safe play areas for our children."

ENDS

For further information contact:

Secretary:

Mary Jones, 3 Backgarden Street, Brighton

Tel: 01273 708954 (hm) or 07777 654321 (mobile)

Email: maryjones@busyroadta.org.uk

Chair:

Ben Miles, 228 Speedy Hill, Brighton

Tel: 01273 671151 (wk) or 01273 274455 (hm) or 07889 654321 (mobile)

Email: benmiles@busyroadta.org.uk

NOTE TO PICTURE EDITOR:

A children's parade will take place at 2pm