

Promoting yourself through the media

A PR guide



**COMMUNITY
FUND**

Lottery money making a difference

Introduction

This handbook aims to help grant holders and partner organisations with public relations (PR) and provide a guide to dealing with the national and regional media. Additional guidance on publicising your grant is also contained within the grant offer pack.

The projects we fund are a clear demonstration of the positive impact of Lottery money on voluntary and community groups. There are hundreds of excellent examples of successful Lottery-funded projects tackling disadvantage at grass roots level.

With your continued help we can raise awareness of the Community Fund and the activities we do and will support.

PR can help promote your organisation and its achievements to a wider audience. It can raise your image, boost your reputation and enhance your credibility.

Dealing with the media is often the simplest and most effective way of promoting yourself. This can be particularly cost-effective and a good use of modest resources.

You don't need to be a professional PR practitioner, but you do need to understand the best way to approach the task to get the best results.

Effective PR will ensure that your key audiences are no longer unaware of your good points, your special strengths, and your achievements. The result of this increased knowledge is greater understanding of your problems, appreciation of your achievements, and awareness of your organisation.

PR can also help on a more practical level. It can help with recruiting new volunteers, promoting your services to those who need them, attracting new committee members and with fundraising.

Working with the media

The media – your local and national press, radio and TV stations - can be an excellent tool to publicise your organisation and promote key messages to people you want to impress and influence.

Articles in the press have more credibility than advertising because they are 'free' – not paid for – and appear to be written by a journalist and therefore seem more objective.

Where possible, it is best to develop good long-term relationships with journalists – particularly relevant specialist reporters.

If you deal with the same person over a period of time a degree of trust can be established and a two-way communication process can be developed.

This has many benefits, including a greater understanding of your organisation and an appreciation of any special issues and misconceptions about your work and activities.

Good relationships may also encourage local reporters to come to you - as a reliable source of information and comment.



Writing for the press

A story for the press must be of genuine interest – if it isn't, it won't grab the attention of the journalist. Good ideas for stories include:

- Developments within your organisation
- Grant awards or financial news
- Staff appointments and training
- Research findings
- Controversial or thoughtful statements by you on topical matters
- Expansion, such as new premises, and of course, job creation
- Award nominations and achievements
- Successful project news
- Milestones
- Human-interest stories

The story you are telling should also have some immediacy; an event that happened a week or more ago is no longer news.

What makes news for one newspaper won't necessarily be of interest to others. For example a local weekly paper will accept different stories to a daily regional newspaper. Weeklies and local evening papers tend to like 'people' and 'human interest' stories, while morning papers and many broadcast media – particularly the BBC – want regional and 'issues'- based articles.

News must be of relevance to that paper's readers, or the viewers and listeners of the media.

A press release is the most common way to communicate with the media, but if it is wrongly targeted and lacking news value it is likely to be discarded. This means you have wasted valuable time and effort, which could have been avoided if you had followed a few basic steps.

Writing a press release

A press release should cover the 5W's

Who? What? Where? When? Why? and...How?

Date

A PRESS RELEASE TEMPLATE

A press release will be edited or cut from the bottom up, so make sure your first paragraph can stand alone if needs be. Make sure you have included who, what, where when and why.

Paragraph two should give more details. You should try and give some qualified facts, written as if by an independent third party. Press releases provide information that is of interest and value to the readers of that publication.

If you are writing for the local press now is a good time to include a relevant quotation. You should include the full name, and job title, of whoever you are quoting.

This paragraph is for interesting but not essential information. You should check now to see if the release flows and make sure it doesn't read like a series of facts cobbled together.

The last paragraph will be the first to be cut and should contain background, or other non-essential information – like a quote to please your boss! Remember to try and keep to 20 or 25 words per sentence and only two or three sentences per paragraph. The release should ideally fit on one side of paper and be around 250 words long.

Ends

Media enquiries: Include the names and contact details of those people willing to speak to the media. You may also want to include the job title and out of hours contact telephone number of the person responsible for media enquiries.

Notes to editors: This section can be used to give explanations, details of research data or to offer photo or interview opportunities.

Using photography

A good photograph can add considerably to the value of a press release. Pictures can remove the need for hundreds of descriptive words.

A good photograph may achieve publication in the media where mere words would not.

It's always a good idea to look at your local papers to see the type of photos they prefer. The composition and content is all-important and should look as professional as possible - with a specific focal point in the picture. You need to get permission from the people who appear in a photo before you publish it. You also need to make sure the owner of the picture is happy for you to use it.

If you have any doubts about your own ability to take similar photos it may be worth using a professional, commercial photographer. They needn't cost the earth.

If you are using a personal camera to take snap shots, ensure

you are achieving a certain quality – for instance, many personal digital cameras do not produce images of a high enough resolution and quality. Indeed, it is worth noting that some local papers do not like receiving digital images and many journalists still prefer prints. It is often worth checking first.

If you are taking and sending prints, make sure every photo is captioned. The caption should contain a title to give an indication of its subject matter – if a photo is accompanying a press release it could be the same, or a shortened version, of the press release title.

Where people are shown, name them correctly, in order, from left to right from back row to front row. Affix the caption to the back of the photo so that it can be read easily.

Sometimes there will be opportunities – if you are holding an event or doing something of note – to invite a photographer from the local press, saving you time and money.

Getting the most out of your media contacts

- Careful targeting of the media is always advisable - blanket mailing of press releases is not effective PR and often a waste of effort and the stamp on your envelope.
- Develop and maintain a media contact lists.
- Identify and target named journalists – especially relevant specialists or district reporters.
- Make sure you have something to say; journalists are bombarded by more press releases than they can ever use.
- It is not always sufficient to have an interesting story to tell – that story must often be enthusiastically ‘sold’ to the media (usually via a telephone call).
- Be clear about your key messages (never more than three) and prepare before you talk to a journalist.
- Always try and be pleasant with the media – even in difficult circumstances; be firm, but never rude or abrupt; always try and return calls.
- If you need details of your local media contact call the nearest Community Fund office who will be able to help you.



TV and radio

Broadcast media (radio and TV) can be an excellent way to get your message across to a wide audience. But take care, most journalists have a story and angle in mind, which isn't necessarily the message you wish to be broadcast.

- Prepare for broadcast interviews and be clear about why you are being interviewed.
- Don't be afraid to ask to run through the key questions before the interview starts.
- Avoid jargon, technical language and acronyms when speaking.
- Be succinct and to-the-point; in an average three minute interview you are unlikely to use more than 200 words.

- If the interview is pre-shot or pre-recorded the editor may select only a 20 or 30 second clip. You will not be consulted about what is to be used.
- Prepare at least one good short quote in advance; also, don't be afraid to illustrate your central point with a brief, punchy example.

Aim to get your message over in a style that is interesting and convincing.

And remember – if you are enthusiastic, then others will listen and be enthused.

The media – press and broadcast – is a great opportunity to publicise an organisation or promote positive achievements. Journalists are only too keen to hear about good news stories from their 'patch' – so get on the phone.

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