

How To Write A Successful Press Release

- Is your community doing good work but going unnoticed by the media?
 - Do citizens in your community generally know less about your program than they should?
- If so, you should consider the use of press releases to help provide notice of events or issues that are important to the community.

A press release can be the single most effective tool for informing the public about a specific issue or subject matter. It can also make the difference in whether an event succeeds. Proper preparation and timing is essential for the press release to be effective.

What Is a Press Release?

A press release is a tool an organization, group or individual can use to notify the public regarding an issue (subject) or event. Press releases generally serve two purposes:

- They announce an event or subject that has already occurred and give specifics about that event.
- They announce forthcoming events or subjects and tell what can be expected at the event.

A press release can be used as an advertising tool to attract attention or participation with interested parties. A press release can also be used to keep the public informed about issues of community-wide concern.

Who Receives the Press Release?

Generally, press releases are directed toward media facilities, such as newspapers and radio or TV stations, that have the capability to disseminate the information to the public. Press releases can also be sent to non-media organizations, such as local or regional foundations or community groups, for informational purposes.

Develop a Successful Press Release

A successful press release provides the intended receiver with as much information in as little space as possible. In short, "brevity" is key to the process. A press release generally should be no longer than a few paragraphs and should contain the following information:

- A contact person who can supply additional information and his or her phone number should be established at the top of the release.
- A main heading that identifies the topic of the release (e.g., XYZ Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community announces the opening of its new community center).
- A first paragraph that announces the topic of the release followed by times and location of the event. A brief description of the participants and the subject matter should also be given in the paragraph. It is also desirable to use quotes and comments from individuals associated with the event.
- A second paragraph could include additional information such as events leading up to the announcement. A good press release generally answers the questions: who, what, when, where, how, and why.

Press releases can also be used to provide informational updates on specific issues or subjects of continuing public concern.

Timetable for Press Releases/Media Advisories

As a general rule a press release should be sent out 48-72 hours in advance of a forthcoming event and within 24 hours of an event that has already occurred. It is important to remember that delaying a release can jeopardize your chance for receiving publication of your event. For bi-weekly or monthly periodicals, plan on submitting your press release at least a week in advance. To ensure timely publication, prepare ahead of time by knowing the media you are likely to target and their publication deadlines.

How To Submit a Press Release

A news organization is most likely to use your press release if the top managers know you and are generally familiar with your program. It will also be very useful if the press release is prepared in a way that requires little or no additional re-writing or formatting to be ready for publication or announcement.

If you do not already know the news director at your local newspaper, local radio and TV station, make an appointment to introduce yourself. Provide information about your community and what it is trying to accomplish (carry along some brief background materials on your community program).

Find out from the news directors the format they would like you to use in preparing your press release and the most appropriate days and hours that press releases should be sent to them. In today's fast-paced world of telecommunication, electronic facilities have become quick and efficient

tools for sending information. Today, the most common method for sending press releases to various organizations is through the use of facsimile machines and personal modems. Both these methods are efficient and cost effective.

Once you have sent out your press release, it is always a good idea to follow up with a phone call to each of the organizations and confirm that the release has been received. You can also confirm whether that organization plans to attend your event or just follow up about the issues covered in the release.

Additional copies of this Technote are available from the Office of Community Development, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Room 701, 300 7th Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20024 (1-800-645-4712). Copies may also be obtained at

<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/ocd>