

Working with the media: creating a press release

Generating publicity for your local RESULTS group is a great way to raise awareness of your group's activities and to recruit new members. Sending out a press release is the best way to inform the media about what you are up to.

▶ Things to think about before you start drafting your press release

The objective: What do you want to say and who needs to hear it? What do you want people to do as a result of this new information? Will sending information to the media help?

Is this news? News, by definition, is new information but it also needs to pass the "who cares" test. Who will care? Determining that will help you determine your target audience.

Key message: Think about your key messages – what do you want the journalist to take away from your story and write about?

Target audience: Not all media are interested in every story, so think about who you should target: is the story a new development? Is it about progress? Which kind of media would be appropriate?

Accurate data: Journalists need a credible and reliable source of accurate data.

Timing: Make sure you know the deadlines of your target publication and when it goes to print – plan early!

Embargoes and advance information: The more information a journalist has in advance, the more time they have to sell it to editors, and the more likely (s)he will write an accurate and compelling story.

▶ Writing your press release

First impressions

- Don't try and make the headline of the press sound too catchy or creative – that's the journalist's job. It should, however, be succinct and snappy and should not contain any development jargon.
- If you are sending a press release to a local publication, mention the town/village/region in the headline. Stories sent to regional publications are far more likely to be picked if they have a local angle and are of interest to local people.
- You have just a few seconds to get the reader's attention so spend most of your time working on the first paragraph. It needs to be newsworthy and should summarise the important information.
- Make sure you date your press release or put "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE" at the top.

Quotes & Endorsements

- Where possible, include a direct, conversational quote within the first few paragraphs of a press release.
- Quotes from a prominent figure, such as a local personality or member of RESULTS endorsing what you are doing can be helpful. Quotes can be used to help explain why this story/event is happening and to emphasize why it is important/relevant.
- If your press release refers to the work of RESULTS in general, ask someone from the office to read through your press release before you send it. Similarly, if you are mentioning other people, or organisations, make sure you get their permission first.

Layout

- Keep the main text of your press release to one page where possible and use a second page for notes to editors.
- Ideally, leave clear spacing between logo, headlines and main text. A clean-looking press release is more inviting to a busy journalist than an overcrowded one.
- Use visuals to sell your story: people respond well to images, and they are memorable. Think about which photographs or graphics you can use that will help to tell your story visually.

▶ Notes to editors

- The “Notes to editors” (NTE) section is your chance to give journalists all of the additional information that you couldn’t fit into the main body of the press release. This should take up no more than one additional page.
- Use the NTE section to include more information about RESULTS and your local group.
- Plug the RESULTS website (www.results.org.uk). Journalists will then be able to access more general information themselves and save you having to answer their questions.
- Use the NTE section to put information like the full address of where an event is happening, directions, who to contact for tickets etc.

▶ Selling your press release

Often, simply sending out a press release is not enough. Speaking in advance to a journalist, and following up with them, is important and can help compel them to write the story.

- Prepare an email ready to send to the journalist. Write a few covering lines explaining what you have sent them and why. You may also wish to refer them to your contact details on the press release if they require further information.
- If possible, include the press release in the main body of the email rather than as an attachment as this will increase the chance of it being read.
- Think about the subject of the email. It needs to catch their attention and may need to be adapted according to who you are sending it to. Journalists receive lots of emails everyday so you’ll want yours to stand out.
- Before you send the email, telephone the journalist to inform them that you are about to send a press release to them. This will give you the opportunity to check that you are sending it to the right person and to the correct email address. It will also give you an opportunity to sell the story and make the journalist more likely to pick out your email from what is probably a very full inbox.

TIP if you are planning on phoning a number of journalists, do them in reverse order of priority. By the time you get to the Guardian or the Times you will have fully perfected your sales pitch!

- Once you have finished the call, send the email and make detailed notes. Do this after each call so that you don’t forget anything. Make notes of who you spoke to and when, email addresses, feedback and comments so that you can go back to friendly journalists and tell them about future events.