



have I got news for you?



making the most of the media

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introduction

We have produced this guide to help groups we fund make the best use of the media to promote their work. We are keen to publicise all the good causes our funding goes to, because it helps the organisations we fund raise awareness of their work, it allows lessons to be learned from each other's practice and it builds understanding of what the Foundation does. But it is far more effective if these stories come from the groups we fund rather than from ourselves. Although dealing with the media may seem daunting, following this guide should mean you can make media work simple and effective, and avoid a drain on your time and resources.

We do not expect you to check with us before you do any media work, as long as you acknowledge our grant in the way we describe in our grant conditions and logo guide. It is, however, always helpful for us to see any news releases you send out, so we are aware of stories that may refer to us. If you need any specific input from us, then get in touch with your Grants Officer, or with our Assistant Director – Policy and Communications.

There are lots of other sources of help including CVS and other umbrella bodies in the sector. The inside back cover of this guide also has some suggestions of specialist organisations that provide information and training for voluntary organisations about communications.



communication and the media



No matter what your size, your organisation has to communicate well if it wants to be effective. How else will people access your services, become volunteers or take notice of your opinions? You don't need to be a PR professional to be a good communicator for your organisation. All you need to do is remember, and act on, a few simple rules:

- be clear about who you are communicating with – your AUDIENCE,
- be clear about what you are saying – your MESSAGE, and
- make sure you communicate your message in a way that people will hear, understand and act upon.

The media – newspapers, magazines, TV and radio – can be a really good way of getting your message across. People take articles in the media more seriously because they come from a third party – the journalist – and therefore seem objective, unlike publicity or advertising. A good relationship with one or more key journalists can, over time, pay dividends for your organisation, offering you an excellent way of publicising your work and casting you as an expert in your field.

Before you can do any successful work with the media, you need to establish:

- your organisation's main aim (and make sure all your staff, volunteers and management committee understand and share it),
- your 'line' on, or clear message about, the main issues you deal with, and
- who will deal with media queries.

deciding who does what

Very few voluntary organisations are large enough to have a dedicated member of staff doing press work. However, it is important to clearly assign the job to someone within your organisation. This might simply be the manager, co-ordinator or chief officer. Or there may be another senior person who is best placed to take it on. If you already have an information or communication officer, you might consider them taking on this role. Or if you are entirely voluntary, then a specific volunteer.

It is also very important to consider the role of your governing body (your trustees, management committee or board) in media work. For some very small organisations it may be better for the chairperson to be the named media contact.

In any case, when you are running any media campaigns, always make sure that the members of your governing body are fully briefed. Remember they are ultimately responsible for what your organisation does, and they should, therefore, take a keen interest in communications.

If you are running a major publicity campaign and you want to have a lot of contact with the press, you can increase your capacity by gathering a team together who are all prepared to 'do the talking'. This could include staff, members of the governing body and volunteers. If you do this, however, you must make sure that your team works together closely and that everyone gives out the same messages.



what is a story?

Organisations, large and small, need to communicate about different aspects of their work with all sorts of audiences. A membership organisation might need to produce a newsletter informing its members of recent developments; one carrying out research might need to organise an event to launch its findings.



Not all of the things you do will appeal to the media. Before spending time and energy on news releases it is worth thinking about whether you have an actual story – something that a journalist will see as ‘real news’:

- stories about people, or how people are affected by issues or policies,
- something that is new, groundbreaking, unique or different,
- stories that are controversial,
- topics that interest a large number of their readers, viewers or listeners, or
- things that entertain or amuse.

‘Newsworthy’ things about your organisation might include:

- money – getting a new grant or investing in a new piece of work,
- expansion of work, developing new services, or creating new jobs,
- research findings,
- landmark events or anniversaries,
- awards, and
- campaign action or statements from you about controversial (and current) news issues.

Remember that if it happened a week or more ago, it is no longer news.

These rules apply generally to all media. But there are variations in the kind of stories different media are interested in.

Local media (for example the Sunderland Echo or Hexham Courant) like human-interest stories with pictures.

Regional media (for example The Journal or BBC Look North) like issue-based and political stories, and stories of interest across the region.

National media (for example the Daily Express or Channel 4 News) like stories that have a wide impact or national interest.

Trade press (for example Disability Now or New Start) like to tell the real story of how policies in their field work in practice, and run items about new ways of tackling old problems.

Developing a 'sense' of what will most successfully appeal to the media from the range of things you want to communicate about will help you make best use of your time and resources.

Before trying to get the media interested in a story, ask yourself these questions.

- Is it really news?
- What is the most interesting angle, or selling point, about the story? Is it about something you can describe as the oldest, newest, first, last, best or worst? Or is your organisation the largest, smallest, only, or best of its kind?
- Which media will be most interested in the story?

news, features or letters page?

A feature is a more in-depth telling of a story. Features usually go 'behind' a topical news item. They might include an interview with one or more key people, or simply present one person's story in detail. Getting a feature in a publication, whether local, national or trade, is very hard. The publication's editors decide what's interesting enough to devote more than a few column inches to; your best bet is to focus on the news angle of your story, and let them decide how they want to run it.

Another way to draw attention to your organisation's work is to write letters for publication, perhaps responding to stories or features, or flagging up issues elsewhere in the news. But be wary of coming across as the 'disgruntled of Tunbridge Wells' stereotype. Only write a letter when you've got something interesting or challenging to say.



reaching your target media

Carefully selecting and targeting your media work will be more effective than randomly sending out hundreds of new releases. You should develop your own list of media contacts, ideally a named journalist or reporter from each publication or broadcaster whom you want to target. This can take time, but if you base your thinking on the questions on page 5 it will help. If you are a small local group working with young people in Northumberland it probably won't make sense to spend time trying to make a contact on The Times, but you should get to know the reporter from your local paper.

It is always best to start with a well-written news release. Unless you know the journalist, it's best not to ring them with a story. If you have something really important happening, you might need to put much more planning into the story and think about running a larger-scale media campaign – in which case you can contact journalists in advance to let them know a story is coming up. You might even want to identify a 'media partner': a specific journalist/publication that you'll let cover the story exclusively.

You need to plan media campaigns in detail, thinking about what you want to achieve and what the story is. You also need to make sure your media contacts are up to date and relevant. There are several things you might include in a media campaign:

- a 'press kit' of background information, pictures, case studies and so on;
- a photo call with people prepared to be interviewed;
- a stunt;
- a local celebrity or politician to launch an event.



issuing news releases

News releases are the usual way of getting stories into the media, but if they are done badly they will be ignored. If you are certain that you have something that is newsworthy, you have a good angle and you know which media you want to target, you are ready to prepare a news release.

Nowadays news releases are most often sent pasted into the body text of an email (NOT as an attachment). News releases are also sent by fax. Very rarely are they sent by post.

Your release should start with the following information:

- the name of your organisation,
- 'News Release' or 'Press Release',
- the date/embargo details ('embargoed' means you don't want the story to run before a certain date, but you are issuing the release in advance),
- the contact person for journalists to speak to and their telephone and (if possible) mobile/out-of-office-hours numbers,
- a reference number where appropriate for your use, and
- a headline (use a shorter version of the headline as the subject of the email if you send the release electronically).

News releases should be as short as possible – one side of A4 is ideal. Releases are edited from the bottom up, so make sure the first paragraph can stand alone if it needs to.

issuing news releases

Content of news releases

- 1** **Headline** – short and punchy, summarising the story. Don't worry too much about getting it perfect – most journalists will come up with their own.
- 2** **First paragraph** – tells the story in two or three sentences and explains why it is newsworthy. This is where your angle comes in (best, first, biggest etc).
- 3** **Second paragraph** – explains the elements of the story – who, what, why, when, where and how.
- 4** **Third paragraph** – normally a quote from a key person. Make it as lively and memorable as possible.
- 5** **Fourth paragraph** – might be a further quote from someone else.
- 6** Put the word 'ends' at this point to let journalists know they have all the text. If you fax your press release and it goes onto more than one page you should insert the word 'more' at the foot of the first page.
- 7** **Notes to editors** – in addition to the main text of the release you can add lots of background information in a separate section at the end. This helps you keep the release itself short and punchy. You should include a sentence or two that gives some background information about your organisation. Also give any other important contact numbers, and your website details if you have one.



12th June 2004

Contact: A Person
Tel: 00000 000 0000

Ref no:

North City Advice Centre
Another Street
North City
NC1 8XS

Tel: 00000 000 0000
Fax: 00000 000 0000
Email: mail@northcityac.org.uk
Website: www.northcityac.org.uk

News Release

1 New advice line launched

2 The first telephone advice service specially designed to help older people in North City is being launched on 15th June 2004. The Advice Centre, one of the city's longest-running voluntary projects, is providing the new service with the help of a grant from Northern Rock Foundation.

3 The line will be open from 2 to 4 pm every day, with an evening service on Wednesdays running until 7pm. Volunteer advisers will provide help with everything from welfare benefits and keeping warm, to healthy eating and leisure opportunities. The service developed following a study carried out with older people to find out what kind of facilities they wanted.

4 Sally Jones, Manager of North City Advice Centre, said: 'Older people are often unable to come into the centre to access services, so we need to work in a way that meets their needs. The telephone service has been designed to do just that: once someone has contacted the line, we'll ring them back, so they're not worried about the cost of the call.'

5 Rob Williamson, Assistant Director of Northern Rock Foundation, said: 'Northern Rock Foundation wants to support organisations that provide effective services over and above what statutory bodies can offer. North City Advice Centre's project is an excellent model of how to develop a service that responds to what older people need.'

6 Ends

7 Notes to editors:

- North City Advice Centre is a registered charity set up in 1974. It provides advice and information on a range of issues, and is open five days a week. Last year it dealt with 1,850 enquiries. It receives core funding from North City Council.
- Northern Rock Foundation awarded a grant of £30,000 over three years in March 2004. More information about the Foundation is available on its website: www.nr-foundation.org.uk or by calling 0191 284 8412.

issuing news releases

Tips on news release style and presentation

You need to be concise and catchy. Imagine that your audience knows nothing about you or your work, and write accordingly. You should:

- write in the third person – ‘he, she, it and they’ rather than ‘I or we’;
- use simple language and short sentences;
- avoid jargon and technical language;
- be careful of acronyms – spell the names in full the first time you use them, then use the acronym after – e.g. Local Education Authority, then LEA.

What to say about Northern Rock Foundation

If your news release refers to work we’ve funded, you should acknowledge our grant. Please remember always to use our proper name ‘Northern Rock Foundation’ **never** just ‘Northern Rock’. If we are the sole or a main funder of the work you’re describing, you should also include a line in your ‘notes to editors’ saying how journalists can get more information about us: the example news release on the **previous page** includes a suggestion of how to do this.

You don’t have to include a quote from us in your news release, but if you would like to, please get in touch and we will try to help.

Before sending the news release

- Read it out to yourself, edit it and check factual information and spelling.
- Get someone else to check it and make sure anyone who needs to authorise sending it has done so.
- Copy it to any other relevant people.



case studies

One thing journalists tend to ask voluntary organisations for is a 'real' person to speak to, by which they usually mean a service user or beneficiary. Allowing journalists this kind of access is always tricky, but it is particularly difficult when you work on sensitive issues. So, if you're issuing a news release it's best to work out your approach in advance.

You may decide that it would not be appropriate to involve any specific individuals. You can, however, still prepare some anonymous case studies e.g. 'Ms X when she first came to us in 2002 had been homeless for two years.' But be careful that anonymous means just that: don't include anything that would make real individuals easily identifiable.

If you do have people who'd be prepared to speak to journalists, make sure it would be safe and appropriate for them to do so, and that they understand what would be involved. If possible arrange the interview yourself rather than giving the individual's contact details to a journalist. Publications and broadcasters may keep these on file and contact that person again in future without going through you. Never pressure someone who is uncertain or reluctant. They may be prepared to speak to a journalist anonymously, or be named but not have their picture taken. Always be absolutely specific with the journalist concerned about these requirements, and wherever possible make sure you're present for the interview.

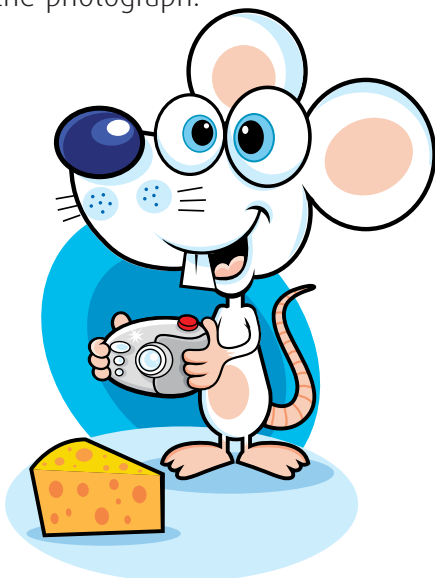
photographs

Pictures, as we all know, are worth a thousand words: a great picture can mean your story gets picked up when otherwise it would not. Picture desks can never promise to attend an event or a press call, especially if a major story breaks elsewhere, so it is a good idea to have your own back-up images.

Look at the media you want to target and see what kind of pictures they like to use. If you can afford it, pay a professional photographer to take pictures for you. Look around at other organisations' use of photographs in publications and check the photo credits. Ask for recommendations. If you cannot afford it, take some pictures of your own. But be very careful about using digital cameras. To be good enough for publication digital pictures must be high resolution. Many publications will prefer an old-fashioned print.

Make sure that you include a caption for each image that clearly links it to your story, including the names and, where appropriate, the job titles of everyone pictured. You should also always give the name of the photographer.

You'll need a good system for filing photographs, whether prints or digital, that illustrate your organisation's work. A simple list by date should be enough, but remember to keep a record of who's in the picture, what it's illustrating and who took the photograph.



doing a media interview

If your news release is particularly successful, or if something happens in the news that is directly relevant to your organisation, you might be asked to take part in an interview. This can seem very daunting, but again by following some simple rules you can get your own messages across successfully. The golden rule is **preparation**. Most journalists will already have their own angle in mind – it is not their job to just tell your story for you.

Things you should do before an interview

- Find out what you can about the publication or programme concerned.
- Make sure you and they are clear about the purpose of the interview.
- Find out what they already know and what they want to find out.
- Establish whether they are interviewing anyone else about the same story.
- Ask them to run through the main questions before they start.
- Don't do it cold – read through any background papers and make sure you've thought about your main messages. For radio or newspaper interviews you can make yourself a sheet of notes to help.

During the interview

- Be clear, to the point and enthusiastic.
- Make sure you get across your main messages – have two or three key points in mind. If possible use a short phrase or sentence (a 'sound bite') that sums up your message.
- Avoid jargon and technical terms.

managing a crisis

Sometimes organisations end up in the news when they don't want to be, because they are having problems or dealing with controversial issues. Two simple rules will help you prepare for such situations.

Take preventative action: anticipate the areas of your work that may court controversy and be ready to talk about them, being clear about your main messages in each case.

Have a crisis response: if something goes wrong, you need to show you are:

- concerned about it – admitting the problem and facing your responsibilities,
- capable – understanding the facts and what you need to do in response, and
- taking action – making sure the problem is resolved or won't happen again.



keeping track

It is a good idea to monitor your media work. This helps you to:

- develop your contacts,
- give out consistent messages,
- challenge inaccurate reporting,
- build a historical record of your work, and
- measure interest in and visibility of your organisation.

Keeping track involves:

- routinely reading the key media for your organisation,
- making sure you keep copies of stories featured in the press, and
- having a way of recording any contacts with journalists.

If you've issued a release to a specific publication or broadcaster, make sure you check whether it's been used. One way of checking is to look at their website. Most newspapers and broadcasters have sections of their sites where you can search for a news item – see the enclosed list of local media contacts for more information.

If you think you will do a lot of media work, you might want to pay for a press cuttings or broadcast monitoring service – if you want more details of these contact us.



further information

The Media Trust is a charity whose purpose is to help voluntary organisations communicate effectively. It runs seminars and training around the country, and has a comprehensive website that includes downloadable information on a range of communications and PR activities.

Tel: 020 7874 7600

Email: info@mediatrust.org

Web: www.mediatrust.org.uk

Northern Rock Foundation has run several courses in partnership with training providers with particular expertise in communications. They are:

The Management Centre

Tel: 020 7978 1516

Web: www.managementcentre.co.uk

The Centre for Strategy
and Communication

Tel: 020 7490 3030

Email: info@the-centre.co.uk

Web: www.cscpebble.com



acknowledgements

In producing this guide we've drawn on the excellent resources of the organisations listed on the inside back cover and also the Community Fund's 'Promoting yourself through the media, a PR Guide'* which is available to download from its website:

www.community-fund.org.uk/about-us/our-publications/north-east/north-east-pr-guide.html
or by ringing: 0191 255 1133.

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