

Developing a Press Release & Pitching Your Story

*Capacity Building Content provided to Karama by APCO
Worldwide at the Clinton Global Initiative*

Press Release Content

- Create catchy, concise headlines
- Include the most important information at the beginning of the release
- Incorporate quotations from organization leadership and those directly impacted
- Add key information and statistics
- Provide an “About Us” section at the end of the release

Key Components

- At the top:
 - ‘FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE’ or ‘EMBARGOED UNTIL [DATE]’
 - The date of the press release
 - ‘Media Contact’: Name, title, and contact information for the media person within or for your organization (telephone and email)
 - Website of your organization

Contents of the Press Release

- A lead paragraph that explains the problem and gives the most important information
- This should answer: who, what, where, when, why, and how
- OR use a dramatic story that hooks the reader
- Next: background paragraphs that give context and present relevant data and statistics
- Use at least 2 quotes, one from a well-known person if possible
- End by repeating or issuing a suggested solution and a call for action
- Close with a brief organizational description (suggested no more than 30 words)

Issuing a Press Release

- To the right place
 - Send press releases to identified reporters or editors to inform them of “what’s new” with your organization
- At the right time
 - Press releases should be issued when something new or newsworthy happens within your organization. Examples:
 - Developing a new or innovative partnership
 - Launching a new initiative or establishing a program in a new location
 - Reaching a milestone (anniversary, breakthrough, success)
 - Releasing data, surveys, or research

Developing Your Story

- Develop your message and story to serve your organizational goals.
- Examples:
 - Changing policy
 - Raising awareness and motivating people to action in response to a particular challenge
 - Stopping an urgent violation, discrimination, etc

Audience

- What Audiences do you need to reach in order to advance your goals?
 - Policymakers?
 - Opinion makers?
 - Activists?
 - International community?
 - Local community?

Self-Assessment

- How is your work different or innovative?
- How does your work impact the issue at hand?
 - The community you serve?
- Is your work a “first of its kind”?
 - If it’s not new, what is different about your approach?
- Can you identify other “superlatives”?
 - The most X, the best Y, the only Z

Superlatives

- Examples of “superlatives”:
 - Your training program for political parties reached the most parties in the country
 - Your staff specialist in gender-based violence is the most widely published in the national field
 - You take an innovative approach to peace & security, the only or first NGO in the country (or the region) doing what you do
 - Your UPR stakeholder report was cited by the UN summary report more than any other NGO’s

Developing Your Key Messages

Key Messages achieve the following:

- They support the main idea or angle of your story
- They drive the development of your press releases, web updates, social media
- They provide your talking points to use in interviews

Messages

- A message:
 - Is a concise statement about your goal
 - Effectively communicates the unique value of your goal or your organization
 - Engages your target audience
 - Test your different messages on focus groups to see which gets the desired response

Think About the Headline

- If your story were to appear in a newspaper, what would the headline say?
 - Explaining the main idea in a concise, compelling way
- If you have to pitch a reporter in an e-mail, what would you put in the subject line to get them to open it?

Winning Strategies for Story Development

- Right place, right time
- Counter-intuitive
- Highlight real people
- Make it local
- Powerful images
- Fascinating facts
- Third parties
- Part of the debate

Winning Strategies

- Right place, right time
 - During a ‘hot spot’ event in the news, you can provide context and texture to what’s happening
 - Make the current events come to life by describing the human experience and impact
- Counter-intuitive
 - Tell a story that contrasts the prevailing mood about a subject
 - Journalists often enjoy surprising their audience by breaking apart the conventional wisdom or assumptions about a story by providing new facts

Winning Strategies

- Highlight Real People
 - The public enjoys hearing about regular people who have experienced special changes in their lives
- Make It Local
 - Journalists are often compelled by local stories brought to life through effective storytelling
 - Strong local media coverage can push a story out to the broader market

Winning Strategies

- Fascinating Facts
 - Polls, research, and well-founded statistics will cut through the clutter in the media if they are relevant to the audience and presented clearly
 - Identify what information is missing about your issue or goal, and collect the missing data
 - Conduct opinion polls and focus groups, and announce the results

Winning Strategies

- Third Parties
 - Having other people ('unnatural allies,' 'messengers') tell your story is often better than telling it yourself
 - The right messenger can build credibility and connect with your audience
- Part of the debate
 - Providing an authoritative voice on the current debate will usually interest the media

Capitalize on Media Trends

- Hot topics – identifying what's hot in the media will enable you to provide yourself as a resource for stories a journalist may already be writing
- New angle – Journalists appreciate a fresh perspective on an existing topic
- Human interest – Journalists like to write stories about people (individuals)

Target the Right Journalists

- Pay attention to who are the journalists already active on your issue
- Look back at the history of their coverage
- Fine-tune your key messages and story angle to what is most compelling for their audience
- Check their publication's editorial calendar for upcoming topics it will be covering
 - Usually found in the advertising section of the publication's website

Leverage High Level Events

- Relevant high level events serve as a news hook
 - Participation in a high level event gives you credibility with the media as a thought-leader
 - If possible, find an opportunity for public speaking in the event
 - Send journalists advance notice about your participation and your organization

Pitching Your Story

- If the reporter does not respond to your email, follow up with a phone call
 - Be mindful of their time: ask if they are on deadline or is this a good time to call
 - Briefly reiterate story angle and key messages
 - Ask if they have questions or would like to schedule an interview to learn more

Social Media

- Know what conversations on social media are taking place on keywords relevant to your goal
- Identify the influential voices in those communities
- Develop relationships with these influential social media individuals
 - Relationships are key to effective social media outreach
 - Start early, don't wait until you want the coverage

Build Relationships

- Add to existing social media discussions, before you try to create or lead one
- Read blogs before reaching out to the authors
- Offer something to the key social media authors: content, interviews, access
- Invite them to your events & press conferences
- Use the social media sites that your target audiences care about and like to use