

Wales Council for Voluntary Action

Supporting charities, volunteers and communities

10. Promotion and marketing

10.5 Effective press releases



Some basic rules

If you can't say your main points on one page of A4 then it isn't worth saying! You are not necessarily interesting – what *you do*, however, might be. Good press releases are simple – don't communicate complexity. Good work can be boring – you have no absolute right to media coverage.

General format and style

Use your letterhead. Mark it clearly 'Media Release' at the top. Next line put the date and words 'for immediate use' if you want it to go into print as soon as possible. If you want it to be published on a specific date in the future put 'embargo until (date)'. The embargo is a 'gentleman's' agreement only – it has no legal standing. Keep your main points down to one side maximum – anything else is additional information and can be included as 'notes to editors'. Offset your text at least one inch to the right (journalists like to make notes on press releases). Contact details should be on each sheet of additional paper as sheets can get separated.

The style throughout must be concise, catchy and as intriguing as possible. Imagine you know nothing about your organisation: does this story stand out; is it really of interest to readers/viewers?

In short, is it tempting to an editor deluged with press releases daily?

Headline

A catchy, short title giving a sense of the story in very few words. Let the journalist write the actual headline for the newspaper, and avoid being 'clever'.

Paragraph one

Absolutely vital that it is short, to the point and newsworthy. Must have the 'five W's': Who, What, Where, When and Why (in any order). This paragraph must be able to stand on its own with the most important information in it. (Keep all sentences short - max 25 words)

Paragraph two

Provide the next piece of information: either more details about the above, or new information.

Paragraph three/four

Only if necessary, e.g. you have more new information. This paragraph is often a quote from someone involved (who is willing to talk to the press if requested). The quote must add a new dimension, such as the personal side of the story. Alternatively it could be a quote from your spokesperson explaining the importance of the story in strong, authoritative language.

Contact details

Name, title, telephone number and mobile phone should be included in clear, bold print at the bottom of the document.

Notes for editors

This is where you can fill in the background. Describe what your charity does in a couple of sentences giving the basic statistics of the issue or your organisation. etc.

If distributing your release via e-mail do not put the words 'press release' in the subject box or as a title. Imagine seeing your email in-box full of messages called 'press release'!

The first sentence has to say who is doing what and when (journalists make a decision on what they can see in their in-box – ie. the very first sentence only).

Write in plain English

Jargon; long sentences and complicated words get in the way of a message.

- Decide what you want to say – write down bullet points before you attempt to write a press release and have your background information at hand.
- Write as if you're speaking to someone next to you. Most people don't use long words or sentences when they speak- so why use them when you write to the press?
- Use phrases people use everyday but avoid clichés. If it doesn't sound right when you say it out loud, change it.
- Keep sentences short and simple. Avoid adjectives.

- Be positive. 'it was a minor problem', not 'we don't think this was a major problem'.
- Be specific. Resources/facilities? Need money for a new building - say so.
- Have someone check your material – it's hard to proof read your own work.

Some Needless Words

Here are just a few examples of simple words that should be used in press releases instead of the alternatives (written in italics).

<i>Accordingly</i>	so
<i>Ascertain</i>	find out
<i>Commence</i>	start
<i>Concur</i>	agree
<i>Discontinue/terminate</i>	end/stop
<i>Numerous</i>	many
<i>Erroneous</i>	wrong
<i>Facilitate</i>	help
<i>Initiate</i>	start/begin
<i>Owing to the fact that</i>	because
<i>Unaware of the fact</i>	didn't know
<i>Utilise</i>	use
<i>Persons</i>	people
<i>Obtain/receive</i>	get
<i>Endeavour/attempt</i>	try
<i>In lieu of</i>	instead
<i>In the event of</i>	if
<i>In close proximity</i>	near

For further information contact

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