



PRESS RELEASE DISTRIBUTION GUIDE

WHAT'S INSIDE:

- Build your media list
- Write the perfect pitch
- Engage with reporters
- Distribute the press release
- Follow-up

FEBRUARY 2021

INTRODUCTION

You have a great press release, it is newsworthy and timely¹. You are ready to send it out – but do you have a media outreach strategy? Media relations is critical to getting noticed by reporters and getting your news in front of the right audience. The following tips can serve as a guide when developing a media outreach strategy.

STEP 1: BUILD YOUR MEDIA LIST

This list houses all information and research on media publications and press. It includes reporters, editors, freelance writers, bloggers and TV producers that work in print, online, radio and television. As you begin to research reporters, make sure to first think about your objective and then define your target audience.

TO CONSTRUCT A LIST:

Identify the right reporters. Think about the type of content you are trying to promote and what types of media your audience consumes. For example, you may want to promote the implementation of a new mental health resource in your state and you are looking to reach mental health professionals. In this instance, you may do a search for industry outlets and reporters that cover mental health in your region.

Tips for finding reporters:

- *Start local.* Take a look at local media and take note of reporters that cover your issue. What are they writing about? Have they written about your issue before?
- *Internet search.* Look for reporters and media outlets that cover your issue or cause. For example, you can find a substantial list of health policy reporters with a quick search.
- *Publications.* Sign up for publications and newsletters that cover your issue. Sometimes a reporter's contact information is included in the byline.
- *Media database.* You can also find reporters through media databases like [Cision](#), [Meltwater](#), [Mud Rack](#), [Agility PR](#) and [PressRush](#). These sites maintain a robust database of reporters across several industries. However, there is a cost to use these services, so compare prices and decide what is best for your organization.
- *Scan social media.* Today, most reporters are using social media and can be found on Twitter and LinkedIn. In the search bar, type "keyword" reporter or "keyword" journalist i.e. Medicaid reporter or Health journalist.

Build your list. You may want to create this list in an Excel worksheet or in your organization's database tool; the bottom line is the format doesn't matter so long as you store this information in a format that is accessible to you and your team. Things you'll want to include are: name of publication, name of the reporter, reporter's title or beat (what do they cover), contact information (email, phone number, social handles) and a placeholder for notes (do they prefer to be contacted by email, have they covered my organization before, etc.)

- Pro-tip: Your media list is a living document and will need to be updated as people are promoted or are no longer with the publication. And you will continue to add new contacts as you identify new angles or audiences to pitch.

1. Is the story new/current? Does it impact the intended audience? Is anyone prominent involved? Is there something intriguing about your story? Will this news shape the future in any way? Is there a human interest?

STEP 2: WRITE THE PERFECT PITCH

Think about your media pitch as your “ask.” What do you want the audience to do? An effective media pitch makes a reporter take notice of your content. Reporters and editors can get up to 100 pitches a day. So how do you stand out? Craft a personalized pitch by showing that you are familiar with their news outlet and that you have an understanding of their readership.

STEPS TO WRITING A GREAT PITCH:

- Start with the lead.** Why is your story newsworthy? What’s the hook (e.g. it relates to a current event or issue in the news, something happening that day or week)?
- Add a call-to-action.** What do you want the reporter to do? Do you want them to conduct an interview, mention your organization in an upcoming story, or write a feature story? Make your intention as clear as possible.
- Define value proposition.** Why should people be interested in your story? Make sure to highlight how this story is different or adds a valuable piece to an ongoing issue or conversation.
- Write a close.** Thank the reporter for their time and reinforce your call-to-action. Also make sure to include contact details, so they can get in touch with you if interested.
 - Pro-tip: Make sure your pitch isn’t too long. Be informative, but concise. Also, do not pitch multiple people at one outlet at the same time. Start with one person. If you don’t hear back and there is another reporter who covers the beat, reach out to them. Another strategy is to say in your pitch “If there is someone else at (xx media outlet) who is a more appropriate contact for this story, I’d greatly appreciate it if you would point me in their direction.”
- Finally, select the right media relations strategy.** Will you pitch your story as an exclusive? Will you send a press release to a media list? Or will you hold a pre-briefing?
 - *The exclusive.* When you give your story to one media publication only, in advance of your announcement. If the story is newsworthy, getting the exclusive is very enticing for a news outlet, increases their investment, and in turn the likelihood that the reporter will write the story. However, putting all of your eggs in one basket can be risky if the outlet decides not to cover your story.
 - *The pre-brief.* A pre-briefing is a process that involves speaking to the media about your news prior to announcing it. This gives multiple reporters a lead on the news, but is no longer an exclusive.
 - *The embargo.* When you show a reporter a press release in advance, you are giving it to them “under embargo.” This is an understanding that the reporter will not write the story until the press release goes live on the wire. Make sure to note at the top of the press release [Not for Immediate Release: Under Embargo until DATE & TIME].
 - *Wire distribution and follow-up with select news outlets.* You can also choose to send a press release over the wire or to your media list and then follow-up with the pitch. With this strategy, you can pitch reporters at different outlets, but do not pitch reporters within the same outlet.

STEP 3: ENGAGE WITH REPORTERS

Media relations or media outreach is the act of pitching reporters on your news and making sure that it is catered to them. When pitching timing, strategy and channels are crucial and a strong delivery will make or break your pitch.

THIS IS AN ONGOING PROCESS:

- Be a value add.** As a subject matter expert, offer to be a resource or to connect reporters to others who may have an expertise in the issue. If you come across a specific resource that may be of interest to them – share it! One way advocates can be of use to reporters in particular is by connecting them with ordinary people who have a story to tell. Include this in your pitch!
- Build an editorial calendar.** An editorial calendar provides a roadmap for communications by outlining the content that your organization will focus on for the year. Think about what topics or issues your organization plans to work on in the coming months. Then connect with reporters and inquire about what they are working on to get a sense of issues that you can pitch for future coverage. What are upcoming opportunities at your organization that would be of interest to the reporter? You can even find that some publications include editorial calendars on their website that you can customize to fit your organization's goals.
- Be social.** Retweet and comment on their stories – ask them questions or provide your own point of view.
 - *You can build relationships with reporters through your organization's social handle, but it's also good practice to have members of your leadership team regularly engaging with priority reporters on social media. For example, your executive director, a project lead or legal team members could all offer their own unique perspectives to reporters through their engagements online.*

Pro-tip: Cultivate a relationship with reporters throughout the year. Offer to meet to inform the reporter of the work you're doing that may be helpful for future reporting. By building a rapport with reporters, pitching can be proactive instead of reactive.

STEP 4: DISTRIBUTE THE PRESS RELEASE

Now that you have a written pitch and have a list of reporters and media outlets, you are ready to distribute. Here, we want to increase the accessibility and visibility of the press release.

HOW CAN YOU REACH PRESS IN THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY?

- Newswires.** For a cost these platforms will disseminate your press release to a target list of media outlets. Reporters use these sites to monitor news, find news stories and article ideas. Prices vary for these widely used platforms Newswire, Cision PR Newswire, and Businesswire.
 - Pro-tip: The best time to send out a press release is in the morning or early afternoon (between 10am-2pm). Avoid Mondays and Friday afternoons.
- Website.** Upload the release to your organization's website for best Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and consider adding a news section to your site for easy navigation.
 - Pro-tip: Uploading your releases as plain text directly to your website (rather than as a PDF, for example) will optimize SEO performance.

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- Email.** Every reporter has their own preferred method of being pitched. However, email is often preferred. Send the release directly to reporters along with the pitch in step 2 and a catchy subject line.
- Blog.** Write a blog post about your news and link back to the press release.
- Social.** Share on your social media platforms and link back to your website to drive traffic there.
 - *As we already mentioned, don't be afraid to engage with reporters directly on social, especially if your organization is responding quickly to a breaking story. Reply to reporters' Tweets about an issue with your statement, or send them a direct message (DM) with your statement to initiate a conversation about the subject you want them to cover. Don't forget to make your ask clear!*
 - *Create custom Twitter lists of target reporters to help prioritize your engagement.*
 - *Canva.com is a free graphic design tool (there is both a free version and free premium upgrades for 501c3 organizations) that you can use to pull together some graphics to go along with your press release on social. [Here's an example of what that might look like.](#)*
 - *Use free tools like bit.ly to shorten and track your links and clicks to monitor which messages and tactics are working so you can make adjustments for future campaigns.*
- More digital options.** During times of physical distancing especially, you may find yourself leaning more heavily on digital options to draw attention to your press release. You can hold virtual press conferences or rallies, or record videos to post on your social channels. You can also use your press release rollout as a launching point to drive followers to a take action page. Check out our [digital organizing guide](#) (and [this addendum](#)) for more digital tips.

STEP 5: FOLLOW UP

You have sent your press release to reporters. So what's next?

- **If you hear from the reporter.** A reporter is interested in your story – now what? Connect with the reporter. Learn what they are writing about and how your organization or issue will be covered. Do they need anything else? When will the story run?
- **If you don't hear from the reporter.** Reporters are busy and can sometimes miss your email. Don't be afraid to follow-up either via email or by phone (if available).

Pro-tip: If a reporter is not responsive after three attempts, don't pester and just move on.

BEYOND MEDIA: USING A PRESS RELEASE AS A FUNDRAISING TOOL

Think of the press release as a tool for relationship building with funders to use an existing grant to secure future funding.

- Take this opportunity to share news of the grant with funders. It is an efficient way of letting them know of your organization's latest efforts.
- Share the release, send them a story resulting from your press outreach, or think about sending an email announcement constructed from language in the press release.

If you have any questions about this document, please reach out to [Katherine Rodriguez](#) and/or [Tori Bilcik](#).