

LANCASHIRE ENVIRONMENTAL FUND PUBLICITY MATTERS!



Introduction

Why do you need publicity?

- to publicise your project and events**
- to increase environmental awareness**
- to publicise your organisation**
- to increase public awareness of your project and funding sources**

Sending a media release to your local paper or television network can result in your project or events being advertised to a wider audience for FREE. Remember the media rely on organisations and individuals to provide them with information to fill their newspapers and airtime so consider them when planning projects and organising events.

It is best to write media releases yourself unless you know of someone working within the media who could use their skills and established contacts. Maintaining control of what you write ensures, to a certain degree, that the factual content is accurate and the attitudes and feelings of the article remain true and positive.

It may be a good move to contact your local media beforehand and establish a contact, if you can find a news editor who is interested or sympathetic to environmental issues so much the better.

Ask if they have an environmental news editor or a reporter interested in the environment; quite often there will be a named person with whom you can establish an ongoing contact.

HOW TO WRITE A MEDIA RELEASE

Planning

Before writing, ask yourself –

Who am I writing for?

What do I want to say?

What facts do I have to support this?

How does my group/organisation want to be regarded as a result of this?

The Reader

The Story

The Evidence

The Message

Content

Think about what makes your story newsworthy – look for a ‘hook’ to catch the attention of the news editor and the potential reader –

- has is a unique selling point i.e. is it new, different, unusual
- look for a human interest angle

It should include the relevant facts – **WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHY, and HOW** and put these vital facts in the first paragraph if possible, (media releases are cut from the bottom to fit spaces in the newspaper so anything lower down may get chopped).

Following paragraphs should expand on the facts and give more detail. You can include quotes attributed to the people involved in the project but keep them short and ask the person for permission to use their quote in the release.

If you have a lot of extra information about the project you can write it separately from the main story under the heading ‘Notes for the Editor’. This information will not be printed but can help the news editor to get a complete picture of your group or organisation. You can use the notes to make clear statements about your organisation but keep comments to bullet points sentences rather than writing reams – news editors generally decide in 5 seconds or less whether to use a media release or not!

Format

Keep it ‘short and sweet’, one page of A4 is ideal. If you have to use two pages make sure that these are stapled together. Date the release.

Media releases should be typed and start with the heading ‘Media Release’ followed by a title typed in bold capitals, avoid underlining. Invariably the news desk will change the title as this is a quick way of ‘putting their mark’ on the piece so don’t spend ages thinking up something creative. There isn’t much you can do to avoid this as the news editor has the ultimate say. You may have to live with an

odd title to get the media coverage you desire and remember it is FREE advertising for your project and its funders.

Type the release in a readable font/type such as Courier or Arial (italics and fancy types and colours are difficult to read and will not be used). The font size should be no smaller than 10 point and the release should be typed in one and a half or double line spacing, it is much easier to read and therefore stands more chance of being selected for print.

If you have to use more than one page type a continuation on additional pages (e.g. heading..../page 2 of 2).

Avoid using unnecessary jargon and if you use technical words include an explanation. Don't split a sentence or paragraph between pages. If you are writing about an event don't forget to put the date, time and venue and if the general public can attend.

Photos

Digital cameras have allowed all projects to keep good photographic records of their achievements and opened the door for budding photo-journalists to 'capture' their projects at vital moments. Launch events, visits by VIPS, or just a colourful day showing off your efforts. Give a bit of thought to the photograph itself and try and avoid the 'line up presentation shot' the media get hundreds of these so try and find a different approach one which shows of the project as well as the VIPS.



When including a photograph (try and include one if you can, preferably a clear good quality print, or digital file if emailing) type 'photo included' at the end of the release. It is almost certain that your print will NOT be returned so digital files are the best option. (Don't send photos to radio stations!) If you are fortunate newspapers may contact you to ask if their own photographer can

come out and take a photo of you/your group. This almost guarantees that the photo will be used so take the opportunity (see photocall notes).

Always include a paragraph at the very end of the release 'For further information contact xxxxx (name) on xxxxx (contact number)' then type **END** underneath.

Please include the following at the end of your media release, these notes are to inform the Editor about your organisation and any other relevant facts that do not fit in the media release.

Notes for Editor

List the contact name and number again and a brief description of your organisation after this for the editor's use.

If you are always on the move list your mobile number, often news editors will want to obtain more details about your story or may wish to send their own photographer to take photos so they will need to contact you and don't have time to ring again and again.

Check spellings and ask someone else to proof read and comment on the release before sending, two minds are always better than one.

Photocalls

If the event is of visual interest you could contact the media and ask them if they would like to send a photographer or camera crew (this almost always ensures your event gets coverage!). Send them details under the heading 'Photocall' explaining briefly what you are planning and invite them to turn up at a certain time to photograph or film it.

If you succeed in getting a photographer or camera crew, (they may need reminding a few days before the event), make sure that everything is in place for the time you have indicated for them to attend, they have busy schedules and will probably only be with you for ten minutes (more in the case of a camera crew). Select an appropriate 'shot' making sure that everyone needed for the photo knows what they are doing before the photographer/film crew arrive but be prepared to take their advice on angles/positioning.

Appoint someone to look after the photographer or film crew and it helps if you provide them with a copy of the media release as well as sending one to their news desk.

They will also need a list of names of people in the photograph/film so make sure this is available and check that names are spelt correctly and that everyone is happy with the possibility of their face appearing in the press or on film.

Distribution

Send to local and regional newspapers (addresses on the Internet or in Yellow Pages) and specialist magazines, ie environmental magazines, local newsletters, church news etc. It is also worth considering local and regional TV, local free newspapers, national newspapers (if the story is of major news) and 'What's On' listings if an event is planned, ensuring that you give sufficient notice, two months is best.

You can follow up your release with a phone call to the news desk but don't pester them or it will probably mean the end of your chances of getting the story published.

Don't forget to keep a copy for yourself and anyone else who may be contacted by the media.

HOW TO COPE IN RADIO AND TELEVISION INTERVIEWS

Daunting I know, try and smile and enjoy it, even if it's a radio interview smiling helps to relax your voice and win over the interviewer.

Visual impact is 80% of television's effect so consider your presentation carefully, seek the advice of the costume department and floor manager with regard to colours and patterns that can play havoc on screen.

On radio background noise makes for more interesting pieces so include some if appropriate, ie childrens playground project - do the interview on site with children playing in the background.

Know your subject - take a 'crib sheet' in bullet point form to remind you. It is not a good idea to use them during the interview but it will help to remind you just before you go on. Don't become the 'boring expert', keep answers clear and of a reasonable length but try not to ramble.

Make sure you are fully aware, and have agreed, the content to be covered before the interview. If the interviewer does attempt to side-track you, you should be prepared to change the subject back to what you want to discuss.

It should be possible to obtain a full list of questions beforehand, if not, certainly they should give you the first question that you will be asked so that you can prepare your first answer.

Find out how much time you will have. If 50 seconds give a good pacey delivery that will be difficult to edit. If 5 minutes then get your most important points over early and then if they edit you will still have got your point across.

If the interview is pre-recorded, try to answer in full sentences. For example, if the question is ...'When does the project have its launch?', then your answer should begin.... 'The project is being launched on ...'.

Work 'live' if possible. Your words cannot be edited and you can get your message across effectively. Remember the more you talk, the fewer questions can be asked. Don't ever say 'No comment' if a difficult question is asked. You can be honest and say 'I don't know' if you really don't know but be prepared to continue the answer with something that you do know.

If you want to avoid answering questions here are a few basic escape routes –

Ignore the question completely.

Acknowledge the question but change the subject

Question the question

Give an incomplete answer

Give a long rambling answer during which you change the subject

Repeat the previous answer in a different way

Claim to have already answered that point

According to a television presenter I met recently most interviewers don't usually know much about your subject and sometimes aren't actually listening to your answer so don't be intimidated by them.

Think laterally when approaching TV and radio it may be possible to access a range of programme areas.

The most obvious areas are general news or environmental programmes but consider late night chat shows or early morning discussion shows or it may be possible to persuade the organisation to make a short film specifically on your subject.

Above all be yourself and be positive!

This document has been produced for LEF project managers by Anne Kingston, LEF Publicity Officer. If you require further advice on publicity matters contact Anne on 01772 317248 or e mail annekingston@lancsenfund.org.uk