

## News Release Guidelines

The following guidelines on placing news releases have been developed to improve your success rate in writing and placing information. Media to target include

- Newspapers
- Magazines
- Newsletters and bulletins
- Community directories (refer to the list under "Print PSAs")
- Radio
- Television, including cable television

### What is a news release?

A news release is the most common of all public relations tools. News releases should communicate key information — the who, what, when, where, why, and how of an event or issue — and contact information to reporters and editors in the news media.

Reporters and editors receive thousands of news releases a week, and they look for accuracy, clarity, brevity, timeliness, and newsworthiness to determine what they will feature in the news. A newsworthy release can be described as one that appeals to the broadest audience and offers the most information with the greatest sense of urgency.

In most cases, reporters or editors will rewrite your release to fit their style, so it's crucial to present the information as clearly and accurately as possible. The best way to do this is by following the journalistic method of organizing the material into an **inverted pyramid**. The inverted pyramid style of writing puts the most essential information at the beginning, followed by items of decreasing importance.

### The Basics

All news releases begin with a headline designed to attract the reader's attention and encourage them to read the entire story. Remember, first impressions are key! If a headline is dull and uninteresting, the reader will assume the same of the release. Large numbers and visual language can make the difference between a sparkling, attractive headline and one that is flat and lifeless. The most essential information in a news release should be listed in the first paragraph, or lead, of the release. Include as many of the who, what, where, when, why, and how elements of the news item as possible.

For the majority of releases, the who, or subject of the release, should include the name of the organization and/or individual who is either an expert on the subject or contact person. The more important or influential the organization and the individual, the greater the appeal of the press release.

The topic of the release, the what, and the where, should be unusual in some way. Unusual can mean different, better, less expensive, unique, or beneficial to the community.

The when of a release actually has two applications — the first being the date and time of the event or issue featured in the release, the second being the date and time for the information to reach the audience.

When addressing the why of a release, remember cause and effect. For example, what caused your council to relocate a camp or to charter a significant number of new units? What effects will these changes have on adult and youth members? If the new location will be more convenient or if new areas of the community will be served, mention this information. A rule borrowed from advertising states that an organization shouldn't promote the features of its product or service, but rather the benefits to its customers.

The how of a news release answers, for example, how a decision was made, how you will achieve reorganization, how changes will affect youth, volunteers, and the overall Scouting program.

**Who** did it?

**What** did they do?

**When** did they do it?

**Where** did they do it?

**Why** did they do it?

**How** did they do it?

The main body of the news release should include significant details that relate to the lead, including quotations and succinct descriptions. Any related but nonessential information should appear toward the end of the release. Generally, the last paragraph provides overall information and statistics about the local council, such as territory served, number of youth and adult members, and the location of the council headquarters. It is also a good place to list a phone number for more information.

## General Rules of Thumb for News Releases

- Always type a news release. Releases should be double-spaced and typed on one side only of 8.5-inch by 11-inch paper with 1-inch margins on the top, bottom, and sides.
- Brevity is the key. Try to limit releases to one or two pages. A news release should not exceed 500 words. A straightforward and concise writing style is the objective. Use short, clearly written paragraphs.
- Never split a paragraph at the end of a page.
- Type "—more—" at the bottom of a page when the release is more than one page in length.
- If a release is more than one page in length, put an abbreviated headline and page number at the top of each page following page one.
- Type "###" to signify the end of the release.
- Clarity, accuracy, grammar, and neatness are vital. Verify all names, addresses, and facts before distributing the release.
- Avoid the use of clichés, jargon, or fancy phrases.
- Don't use flowing tributes, flowery descriptions, or glowing adjectives when writing your news release. The news release should be more informative than subjective. Be impartial and objective; try to write the release as the reporter might.
- Use first and last names on first reference. Use last names only on subsequent references. Include titles and descriptions, such as district chairman, or a person's hometown or age. Provide full names of groups with appropriate descriptions.
- If an editor must choose between two otherwise equal releases, he or she is more likely to pick the release that has an accompanying photograph. If including a photograph with your release, make sure it will capture the interest of the reader. Every photograph should include a complete and correct caption that identifies each person and the action in the photograph. Your photograph file should include the following information on each photograph: source, date taken, copyright information, and releases signed by people in the picture.
- Put the local news angles at the beginning of a release if the story covers an area beyond the community's borders or newspaper's circulation area.
- Include a good quote from Scouts, volunteers, or local distinguished individuals early in the story.
- Add boilerplate material. This is general information about the Boy Scouts of America that help people understand the importance and relevancy of Scouting. For example, "Scouting has had more than 100 million members since its inception in 1910."

## Delivery of the News Release

**Work the local angle.** Look for a local angle, or hook, in every story and make sure the appropriate news bureau knows about it.

**Think photos.** The perfect photograph to support your story requires planning and attention to detail. When pitching an event, be sure to pitch to the photo desk as well as the reporter. Use a professional 35mm camera. Send newspapers black-and-white glossy photos, unless you know they can use color shots. Newspapers want photos that are at least 5 inches by 7 inches. Include captions with photos that tell the story and identify individuals in the photo. *Make sure you have signed model release forms for all individuals in the photograph.*

**Avoid fax pollution.** Some newspapers welcome and encourage faxes. However, some media resent having their lines being tied up. Be considerate and ask your contacts their preference for receiving news releases.