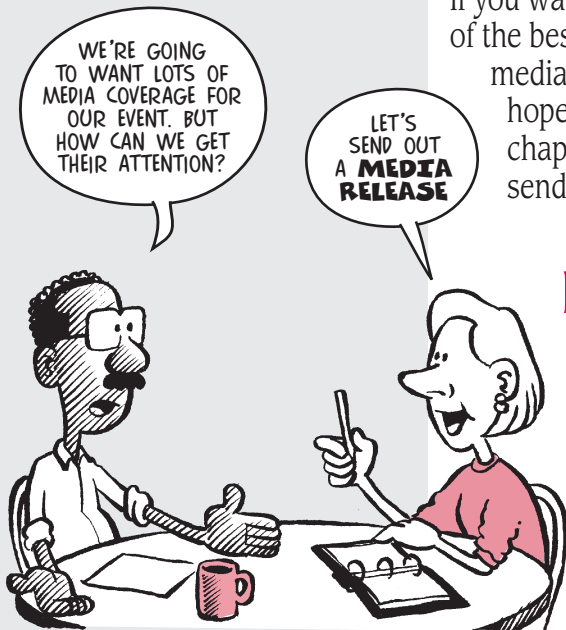


MEDIA releases



If you want the media to cover a public event your chapter is planning, one of the best ways to get their attention is to send out a media release. A media release briefly tells media outlets what you are doing and why, and hopefully it interests them enough that they'll want to report on it. This chapter covers some basic guidelines to keep in mind when writing and sending media releases.

Before writing a media release

Know when you can use the Council's name

Make sure that the content of your media release is consistent with the Council's national campaigns, and with the Council's Statement of Purpose and Guiding Values and Principles. If you're unsure, contact your regional organizer or the national office.

Decide if it's really news

Be sure the news release is actually "news." Don't waste your time and the editor's time with old information. The fact that a local chapter of the Council is upset about cuts to social programs isn't really news. But say the chapter holds a public ceremony to declare the local health clinic an "endangered species," complete with the presentation of an endangered species certificate. Now that's news!

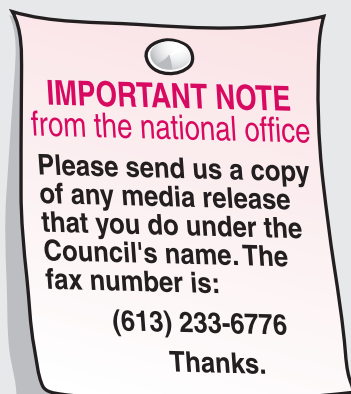
Know who you're dealing with

Find out what media outlets there are in your community and get the names of people you can send your media releases to. Get to know the media you're dealing with. What kind of content does it have? Who is its audience? Then, write your release to fit those things.

Writing the release

Keep it short and punchy

Keep the media release to one page, 8½" by 11." Editors don't have time to read everything, so they won't read long releases. With this in mind, be sure to put important information at the beginning of the release. Make the first paragraph a kind of summary which quickly explains the "Who? What? When? Where?" and "Why?" of what you're writing about. Give the news editor something to grab on to. News stories are structured as "WHO is doing WHAT and WHY," so you should try to structure your media release



that way. The editor will more likely see your release as a news story, and there's a greater chance it will be picked up. For example, "Farmers protest BGH tomorrow, because they fear for their cows" or "Seniors hold a 'rock in' to protest new Seniors' Benefit."

Active VS passive writing

Try to write in an active voice instead of a passive voice; the active voice is stronger. It's more powerful to say "Council members will picket outside the company" than to say "The company will be picketed outside by Council members."

Keep it about people

Remember, stories are about people. Always write the media release in terms of people and how they will be affected by the issue.

Identify yourself

Clearly identify yourself or your chapter in the media release. Don't assume people know your group or organization. In the same vein, avoid using jargon or slogans which outsiders won't understand. If you use an uncommon term, be sure to explain it.

Sending out the release

A question of timing

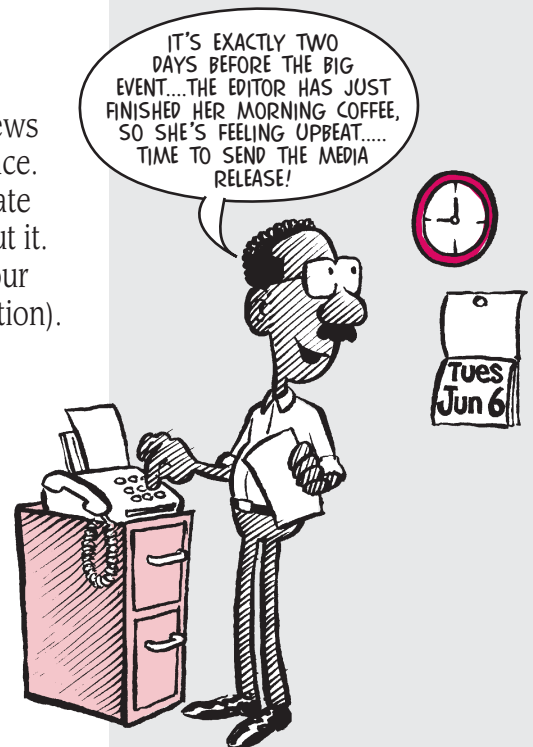
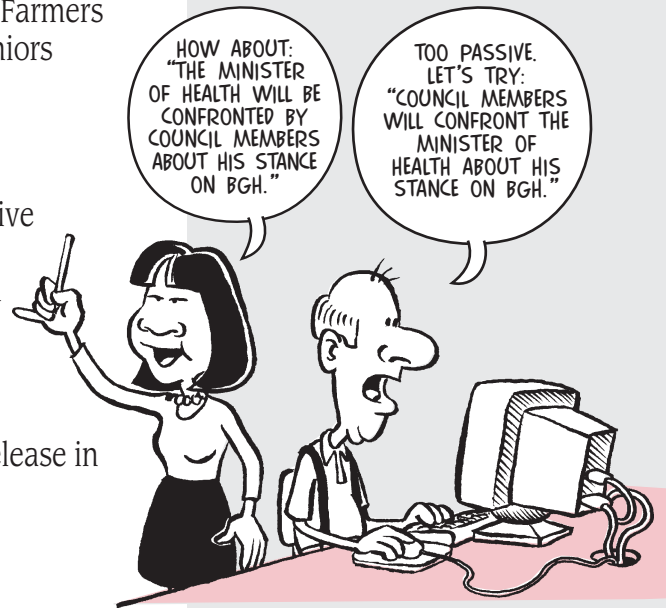
Pay attention to the timing of the release. The timing for a monthly news magazine will be different from that of a weekly radio show, for instance. You'll want to send the release early enough that people can incorporate it into future editions or shows, but not so early that they'll forget about it. If you want the media to write a story about the issue in advance of your event, send the release earlier (and include more background information).

Deliver it, fax it, but don't overdo it

Make sure the media release goes to the right person; otherwise it will get lost in the pile. If possible, hand-deliver your release to the assignment editor or producer. If not, a fax will suffice. Also, never flood a media outlet with your release. Sending information more times than necessary doesn't help your chances of getting media coverage. In fact, it may even harm them. Editors and producers will simply start turning off every time they see your letterhead.

Don't pester them

If you're faxing your release to the media, don't call them up after to see if they've received it. Editors get dozens and dozens of media releases a day, and they don't want everyone calling them to confirm whether or not they got some fax. You shouldn't believe that you can pester the media into writing a story—they'll write a story if they feel it's worthy, so try to concentrate on creating a worthy story. You should, however, call media outlets on the day of your event to remind them it's taking place.





Eye-catching ideas

Media releases are almost always written on standard white paper and sent by fax or through the mail. But don't be afraid to be more creative. For example, if you were launching a campaign against bovine growth hormone, you could deliver your media release tied around the neck of a stuffed cow with a giant udder. That would certainly get the editor's attention! In fact, delivering your cows to just a few key media outlets might get more attention than sending your release by fax to a whole bunch of them.

A sample media release

13 July 2000

Health Clinic put on Endangered List by Local Council of Canadians Chapter

(GEORGIA) The Georgia Community Health Clinic has been declared an "Endangered Species" today by the Georgia chapter of the Council of Canadians.

"The Georgia clinic is under threat from Ministry hunting," says Council representative Stella Chan. "Clinics around this province are being culled at an unsustainable rate. We fear the Georgia clinic could be next."

And so today, July 13, at 11 am, Chan and other Council reps will present the clinic with an "Endangered Species" award. The ceremony will take place on the front lawn of the clinic. Bani Schmelder, the clinic's executive director, will accept the award.

"Hey, we need all the protection we can get," says Schmelder.

Provincial funding for health care has decreased 25 per cent in the last 3 years. The small rural health clinics have been particularly hard hit by cuts, with the numbers of health clinics in the province being reduced by 30 per cent.

The cuts have put the people served by the clinics at great risk, says Chan. People in rural areas have been forced to travel further for their health care and emergency response times are much greater.

As well, when small communities lose their health clinic, people lose their jobs and many move away from the area.

"We need to boost the number of clinics to a sustainable level, in order to ensure healthy people and healthy communities," says Chan. "We're hoping, the 'Endangered' designation will spur the government to act."

The Council of Canadians is a 100,000-member strong national corporate and government watchdog, with local chapters throughout the country

For more information:
Stella Chan, The Council of Canadians: 573-0694

Always date the media release.

Write a catchy headline that lets the news editor quickly understand what the media release is about.

The first sentence should follow the WHO is DOING WHAT structure.

A good quote near the top keeps the release interesting and helps explain your point of view.

Make sure all the relevant details about the event are prominently displayed in the release.

A quote from someone outside your organization helps to strengthen the story.

Back up your arguments with statistics or studies.

Near the end of the release, elaborate on your argument.

Provide some information about the Council so that people are aware of what the organization is about.

Always provide at least one contact name and number.

If there's room, summarize the event information for easy reference.

