

SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

PREVENTION FIRST
Building community capacity to prevent substance abuse

TIP SHEET

THE ART OF THE PRESS RELEASE

Your organization has a big announcement to make. Your job is to alert the media! It is time to put all those great ideas swirling around in your head to paper (or your computer screen). Writing a good press release is one of the most important pieces in holding a successful event or simply for sharing important information. Below are some questions to ask yourself the next time it falls upon you to promote an event, organization, or announcement.

Is it newsworthy?

Your press release needs to have a human interest angle. You want people to be able to “connect” to your event/organization, and the best way is to carefully craft a story that most people can relate to. To get your message communicated through the publication, you need to convince the reporter/editor that your message (or the story surrounding it) is newsworthy. So it’s got to have appeal to the entire readership of the publication. (James, 2010)

Is your headline strong?

It’s the first thing a news director or reporter sees, and it is the most important part of the release. It needs to stand out from other releases and pitches. A strong headline (and, for that matter, email subject line when you send out the pitch) will pull in journalists seeking good stories. Your headline should be as engaging as it is accurate. (Cutler, 2013)

Is it written as a news story?

Unlike past times, today’s press releases should be written as a news story, complete with a compelling opening, and quickly reaching the main point. A press release should also steer clear of prevention lingo and acronyms. A great press release is not something that prompts a journalist to write an article; rather, a great press release is published as an article. (copyblogger, n.d.)

Does your release contain the W’s?

The five W’s taught in Introduction to Public Relations are important! They are: Who (who is involved?), What (what is happening?), Where (where is it taking place?), Why (why is it happening?), and When (when is it taking place?).

Did you proofread it?

It sounds like a simple thing, but it’s always a good idea for a new set of eyes to proofread a release after it’s been written. It’s not that press release writers think they are infallible, it’s just that after someone sees something several times one way, it begins to look correct. So rest your eyes and borrow the eyes of a colleague you trust. One single typo or a bad link can spell trouble for your masterpiece.



Prevention First
2800 Montvale Drive
Springfield, IL 62704

Funding provided in whole or in part by the Illinois Department of Human Services and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

How long is it?

Opinions vary, with some experts recommending one only page and others agreeing that going to two pages is acceptable. Therefore, a rule of thumb is to keep press releases to one or two pages. If you are having trouble whittling it down, think about your organization's elevator pitch. If you have just a few minutes to tell someone about your event/organization, what would you say? In other words, address the important points in the first few sentences. The subsequent paragraphs should be for supporting information. (Cutler, 2013)

In what timeframe should it be distributed?

First, determine when you want coverage. Do you want coverage before, during, or after the event? If you want coverage before the event, press releases should be sent around five days before you'd like the coverage to appear.

If you want a reporter and/or photographer to come to the event and cover it as a news story, send the release around two weeks in advance. Follow up with an email or phone call a week before the event. For coverage after the event, send a press release a few days after the event whether the media attended or not. Find the most memorable moment or interesting factoid about the event and base your post-event press release on it. (Miller, 2008)

Please click [here](#) for a press release template, complete with section descriptions.

References

copyblogger. (n.d.). Retrieved from [www.copyblogger.com](http://www.copyblogger.com/how-to-use-the-modern-press-release/): <http://www.copyblogger.com/how-to-use-the-modern-press-release/>

Cutler, Z. (2013, January 13). Retrieved from [www.huffingpost.com](http://www.huffingpost.com/zach-cutler/press-release-tips_b_2120630.html): http://www.huffingtonpost.com/zach-cutler/press-release-tips_b_2120630.html

James, G. (2010, November 10). Retrieved from [www.cbsnews.com](http://www.cbsnews.com/news/how-to-write-a-press-release-with-examples/): <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/how-to-write-a-press-release-with-examples/>

Miller, K. L. (2008, September 3). Retrieved from [www.nonprofitmarketingguide.com](http://www.nonprofitmarketingguide.com/blog/2008/09/03/how-far-in-advance-do-i-send-an-event-press-release/): <http://www.nonprofitmarketingguide.com/blog/2008/09/03/how-far-in-advance-do-i-send-an-event-press-release/>