

Guidelines for Effective Media Releases Structure

(Thank you to the Vancouver Foundation for developing this resource package.)

Virtually all news releases are structured in the "inverted pyramid" journalistic style, with the most significant details up top and other facts presented in diminishing order of importance. This allows editors to easily cut from the bottom up.

The first part of the news release is called the lead - the "hook" that entices the reader into the story. The lead covers off the who, what, why, where, when and how of the news event, generally in the first paragraphs, and should emphasize what is unique about the story. The first sentence should contain eye-catching fact or the news point of the story.

Subsequent paragraphs should expand on the lead, providing additional details about the news event and concluding with the least important information. Try to keep paragraphs fairly brief, no more than three or four sentences long.

FORMAT NOTES

News releases should be restricted to a maximum of two, 8½" X 11" pages. If warranted, supplementary information (e.g., a profile of your organization) can be provided as a separate enclosure with your release, clearly labeled as a "Backgrounder".

All news releases should:

- Identify the sender, including the organization name and complete address, at the top of the first page;
- Provide a contact name and phone number for more information, either on the top of the first page or at the end of the release;
- Indicate the date of issue and the release date or time at the top of the first page (e.g., "For Immediate Release" or "For release after 10 a.m., Tuesday, August 26");
- Indicate the geographic point of origin of the release with a "dateline" at the beginning of the first paragraph (e.g., Saanich, BC)
- Leave room for editors' notations (few will use a release verbatim) with minimum 1" margins and 1.5 double spacing between lines;
- Indicate when text continues on a second page with the word "-more-" centered at the bottom of the first page;
- Indicate the end of the release with either the symbol "-30-", the symbol "-#-" or the words "The End".

It's a good idea to put a short headline on the release that summarizes the story so editors know what they're getting.

WRITING TIPS

- Use short, vivid sentences and everyday words, avoiding jargon and technical language.
- Include explanations of any technical terms that you can't avoid using.
- Try to write in the active, rather than passive, voice. This helps to make the release more immediate and clear.
- Follow the standard journalistic form of writing in the third person (i.e., don't use "we" or "us" in the text of the release except in quotes).
- Use quotes attributed to the appropriate spokespeople to add interest and help tell the story. To avoid confusion, don't quote more than two or three different people in a news release. It's generally considered acceptable to edit the quotes you have obtained for clarity or impact as long as the quoted individual has an opportunity to review and approve the text. Or, can you prepare a suggested quote for their approval.
- Enhance newsworthiness by emphasizing local interest (e.g., local impact of the grant, local participants, etc.)
- Once the release is drafted, go over it and cross out any unnecessary words. Be sure to check every point for accuracy before sending any release out.

DISTRIBUTION

The sooner after the fact a release is sent out, the more newsworthy it's content and the better its potential for pick-up by media. Sending along an interesting, good quality photograph, with subjects identified in a brief caption or "cutline" affixed to the back, can also help to generate better coverage of your story.

To avoid getting lost amidst the huge volume of material received daily by most media outlets, news releases should ideally be directed to the appropriate editor, reporter, producer or other media representative by name.

It pays to cultivate the acquaintance of people in the news media. An editor or journalist who is kept up to date with your organization's aims and programs will likely have more interest in covering your news story

SAMPLE NEWS RELEASE

Community Connections for Success, Box 1277, Houston, BC VOJ 1Z0
(250) 845-7266 phone; connections@nwcc.bc.ca

For Immediate Release [Date]

Community Connections for Success Gets Grant from Vancouver Foundation

Houston, BC -Community Connections for Success has received support from Canada's largest community foundation for its family literacy initiative designed to support literacy development, education and lifelong learning for families facing barriers to education.

Richard Mulcaster, President and CEO of Vancouver Foundation, announced this week that the Foundation's Children, Youth and Families committee has approved a \$20,000 grant for the second year of this project. The Foundation also supported the project in the first year.

The project targets under-educated, low-income parents in the community of Houston and assists them in developing the skills required to improve personal, family and community interactions.

Vancouver Foundation administers a permanent endowment with assets of approximately \$500 million, representing the combined capital of over 800 funds created through bequests, from living donors and through other gifts. Grants are made from the income that is generated from investment of the pooled capital of these funds. Although Vancouver Foundation is located in Vancouver, the Foundation provides grants to registered, charitable organizations throughout British Columbia.

Janet Marren, librarian for the Houston Public Library, indicated that this is a significant grant to the project and she is delighted by the news. "We are confident that this support will help to make this project a success within the community and will also attract other donors, contributing to the long term sustainability of the project".

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Contact: