



Preventing Chronic Diseases: An Investment in New York State

Writing a Press Release

What is a press release?

A press release is written communication directed to members of the news media for the purpose of announcing something newsworthy. The purpose of the press release is to get reporters' attention so they seek out more information and ultimately cover your topic. Typically, press releases are mailed, faxed, or e-mailed to assignment editors at newspapers, magazines, radio stations, television stations, or television networks with the goal of securing an article or a news story.

Why should I write a press release?

A press release is an effective way to obtain earned media (see Earned Media 101). Press releases can announce a range of news items, such as scheduled events, awards, new services, important new data, or program accomplishments.

What are the core elements of a press release?

Press releases contain nine components:

1. Letterhead/Logo

Place your organization's logo or letterhead at the top of your press release. This makes it easy for press staff to identify where the press release is coming from and lends credibility to your news.

2. Contact Information

Once the press read your release, they may want to reach you or your organization for more information. Include the contact information of the point person on your team who can most effectively field media calls and e-mails. These details should be placed at the left hand margin. For example:

Contact:
Jane Doe
Company Name (if appropriate)
100 Anywhere Ave
Big City, New York, 10000
Phone; Fax
email@example.com

3. “For Immediate Release”

Most of the time, you want your news to go public as soon as possible. In this case, include “For immediate release” toward the top of your document. This indicates that there is no holding period for publication. If you want a hold on the information, write “Embargoed until...” and add the date and time.

4. Headline and sub-headline

The headline is your opportunity to grab the reader’s attention. It should summarize your news and encourage the reader to continue reading. The sub-headline should describe the headline in more detail. Both are typically written in the subject-verb-object format and should be around 70 characters at most. Both the headline and sub-headline are centered. The headline is usually written in all capital letters, while the sub-headline is written in title case (both upper and lower). For example:

Headline: COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT LAUNCHES CHILDHOOD OBESITY PROGRAM
Sub-headline: Community Grant Keeps Kids on Playgrounds, Off Couches

5. Dateline

The dateline includes the date, as well as the city and state where the press release is being issued. The dateline precedes the first paragraph of the release. For example:

ALBANY, N.Y. (March 3, 2014) – In recognition of National Patient Safety Awareness Week March 2-8, State Health Commissioner Nirav R. Shah, M.D., M.P.H., is encouraging healthcare providers throughout the state to work together to improve the quality of patient care.

6. Body

The body contains the content of your news story. The first paragraph should succinctly summarize the entire story, clearly articulating who, what, when, where, why, and how the story happened (or will happen). Subsequent paragraphs describe these same elements in further detail. Although there are ways to frame details to provide a certain angle to the story, use facts only. Do not include opinions — the media should be able to easily use the facts as written.

7. Quote

While press releases should be factual, support your story with a quote from an organizational representative (usually a director or lead on a project) as a way to frame your angle on the story. You may also consider including a quote from a credible third party, such as a content expert, community leader, or constituent affected by your story. Properly format your titles, and don’t let quotes overshadow the facts — use quotes to highlight and support the content.

8. Boilerplate

The boilerplate is the few sentences that you include at the end of all of all press releases and materials. The boilerplate accurately and succinctly describes the identity of your organization and what it does.

9. ###

This indicates the end of the press release so that the journalist or editor does not miss any information. If your release is longer than one page, insert "--more--" at the bottom of each page.

How should I format a press release?

Format press releases to the industry standard to ensure they are viewed as credible. Avoid untraditional fonts, graphics, and design elements.

- Use a traditional font and double spacing.
- Limit the length to no more than two double-spaced pages.
- Write in the active voice.

When contacting the media, are there any best practices?

Follow these key best practices:

- Compile accurate and up-to-date phone numbers and contact information for all your media contacts.
- Have either a dedicated phone number for reporters or alert staff that a press release has been sent to the media and how to handle incoming calls.
- Customize voice mails if you are expecting media calls identifying who will be returning calls, when they can expect a return call, and an alternate phone number if they need immediate assistance.
- When a reporter calls, be prepared with key background information to help answer detailed questions.
- If there are experts or people quoted in the press release who a reporter may want to speak with, have some pre-determined times for when the reporter can reach the person(s).