How to Write and Distribute a Press Release

Write & Distribute a News Release

A news release is the standard document for carrying a basic message about your campaign or your issue to the outside world. The biggest mistake people make regarding news releases is that they write too many. News releases should be saved for a newsworthy (meaning new and different) event or story. Some examples of when to issue a news release include: to announce a stance on or response to an issue, to release an evaluation of the work of public officials, or to promote public hearings.

Writing a News Release:

Give Yourself Time — Releases take time to write well.

Use the Proper Format — Use the sample news release as a guide for proper formatting. The important components of the formatting include:

- Use organizational letterhead, and type "News Release" in a large-sized typeface on top of the first page.
- In the top left, type "For Immediate Release" if appropriate or put a specific day the story should be released.
- In the top right corner put the name and phone number of the contact person(s)
- Try to keep the release to one page.
- Type "more" at the bottom of each page except for the final page where you should type "###" which indicates that the news release is finished.
- Use a catchy headline to attract attention to your news.

Write in Pyramid Style — Your news release should read like a news story. Say the most important things first, and use a catchy lead sentence to engage your reader. A limited amount of background information and supporting quotes should be put in the following paragraphs. In general, paragraphs should be limited to one or two sentences. The first time you use an acronym, make sure it appears in parentheses after the full name of whatever it represents.

Use of Quotes —Your press release should include 2 or 3 pithy soundbite quotes. Quotes should be front-loaded, in other words, the conclusion should come first followed by the argument (this contradicts how we usually make arguments). Quotes are like pictures, they need to be framed. Make sure the quotes connect to the contextual text around them. Finally, be sure to only quote one person per organization and read their quotes aloud to make sure they don't sound stilted.

Keep it Short — Limit the release to one page, two only if absolutely necessary. Keep it simple, clear and direct. Do feel free to include visual aids, such as photos from the campaign, to increase interest when possible.

Distributing a News Release:

Always follow up with a phone call — Follow up the release with a phone call to the news outlets to make sure they received the release and to urge them to cover the story. Try to reach a live person with your phone call. If you must leave a message, keep it as brief as possible but give the top reason for why the release is newsworthy. If an outlet did not receive it, offer to send it again. Both your release and your phone call should convey a sense of urgency without being hysterical or crying wolf. In other words, pitch alarming news but don't be an alarmist.