

What is a press release?

A press release is an official statement that is written by organizations and businesses and sent to targeted members of the media with the hope that they will communicate the story to their audience. It should contain all the essential information (who? what? where? when? how? and most importantly why?). It should be no more than one page long.

Why are press releases important?

NGO press releases are a free marketing tool to help organizations share their news with journalists, bloggers, social influencers, pundits, and the general public. They can have the following results:

- An editor publishes an article using facts and quotes directly from your press release.
- A journalist wants to learn more and reaches out to your organization for a bigger story
- A journalist becomes aware of your mission and begins to build a relationship with you and your NGO

PRO TIPS AND BEST PRACTICES

1. The headline and first paragraph are the most important

The headline is where members of the media will make the choice to read the rest of the release or pass on writing about it. Writing the lead paragraph first will help identify what goes in the headline.

- Before writing a lead paragraph, decide which aspect of the story – who, what, when, where, why, how – is most important and interesting and emphasize that. Put the most important information in the first sentence. Less important information in the second sentence, and so on. Those first couple of sentences are called the “lead.”
- The lead paragraph needs to draw the reader into the story. Write it in such a way that they will be curious to read more. It can be entertaining or factually informative but must be easy to read.
- Pull highlights from the lead paragraph to create a one or two-line headline that sells your story.

2. Buzzworthy topics and timing

- Monitor the news for topics that are in the headlines or are “buzzworthy,” meaning they are attracting a lot of attention. If you can connect your message to buzzworthy topics, your message will become more relevant to media outlets looking for timely stories to cover.
- Monday through Wednesday appear to be the most effective three days for distributing press releases.

Basic elements and format of a press release

1. Organizational Info: logo, website, public and donor contact info
2. Date/time the info in the press release can be distributed: usually will be, “FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE”
3. Headline: Centered across the top of the page
4. Contact Information: Who should a Journalist contact for more information, and how to reach them
5. Format:
 - Location, day, date (starts the first line of the release)
 - The main story you’re trying to tell
 - Short paragraph of ‘General Information’ about your organization to provide a background
 - ### centered below the content of the Press Release to signal the end



EMPLOYABILITY SPOTLIGHT:

Learning to write a press release will make you more employable

Good communication skills are essential for most middle class jobs and writing a press release encapsulates many communication skills.

Writing a good press release requires knowing how to organize ideas, prioritize information, and how to tell good stories. The skills needed to write a good press release can be applied to almost any marketing and promotion task you take on.

The practice of persuading people to see things how YOU want them to be seen - by communicating in interesting ways, and with clarity - is key to success in every aspect and level of business, from entry-level sales and marketing to high-level policy making and top leadership.

5. Be intentional about SEO and keywords

Your press release should be “Search Engine Optimized” or SEO. This is because press releases in any digital form will often be reposted on news websites and social media. Decide on a few key words that you think people will enter into a search engine when exploring topics related to your story. Use these words in the headline of your story.

Also, remember that more organic or “natural” links add to your site’s reach, ranking and value. Other benefits from making your press release Search Engine Optimized include:

- Brand visibility
- Brand/name recognition
- Referral traffic



Pro Tip #1

Anchor text

Anchor text is another valuable SEO tool. It is the visible, clickable text in a hyperlink that allows users to navigate from the press release to webpages. It is important for SEO because it can help search engines understand what a webpage is about. Keep the anchor text to a few words if possible, and don’t provide a long sentence that does not look natural. The anchor text should describe the page you’re linking to and help entice end users to click on the link.

3. Include meaningful direct quotes

An NGO press release will often include a quote from the executive director or board president. The direct quote should be only a sentence or two and be located in the second or third paragraph of the press release. Using direct quotes helps bring the story to life and may further encourage the journalist to reach out to interview the person quoted.

4. Include next steps for audiences

Journalists will want to know how their readers/listeners can get involved, so your release should conclude with action steps for the public. This could include how to get tickets or how to volunteer for an event; how to learn more about the topic; how to donate to the NGO, etc.



DEVELOP A MEDIA DATABASE

1. Identify your target audiences and media outlets

Your NGO could have more than one target audience, so list the media organizations that speak to your audiences. Once you have the list, identify editors and reporters from each outlet who cover your specific topic or area.

2. Create your database

Below is a sample media list imagined for the city of Quito, Ecuador. Each NGO will need to create their own database that speaks to their audiences.

Name/type of media organization	Focus of the media organization/audience they serve	Persons name/position	Contact information
El Comercio; Newspaper	Comprehensive coverage; National audience	General	info@elcomercio.com 123 Main Street, Quito, Ecuador
El Comercio; Newspaper	Comprehensive coverage; National audience	Arturo Lopez; Reporter	Arturo.Lopez@elcomercio.com 123 Main Street, Quito, Ecuador 593 2 2448 578
Quito Arts Weekly; Online magazine	Arts in Quito; Artists, Designers, Museum Directors	Mario Delgado; Website publisher	Mario.Delgado@Quitoarts.com 593 2 2434 599
Alumni of Central University of Ecuador; Facebook page	Alumni news and future of university and Quito; Alumni of Central University of Ecuador	Rosie Carolina	facebook.com/rosiecarolina
Barrio Jipijapa Forum; Message Board	Barrio news, gossip, opportunities, opinions; Jipijapa residents and businesses	General	Must sign in to post at BarrioJipijapaMessage.com
How We Live in Quito; Podcast	Advice on living healthy in Quito; Health-conscious people	Anders Garcia; Podcast Host	Anders.Garcia@healthyquito.com 165 Broad Street, Quito, Ecuador
Quito Beautiful; TikTok	Promotes specific lifestyle in Quito; Mostly young women	Viola Sanchez; Social Influencer	viola1820@gmail.com tiktok.com/@QuitoBeauty
Iglesia de El Carmen Alto Newsletter; Church	Reports on announcements, services, and stories of interest to congregation members	Miguel Zambrano, Church Administrator	Mzambrano @carmenaltoocd.com



STRATEGIC USE OF YOUR PRESS RELEASE

Are press releases still relevant when fewer people are buying newspapers?

Yes, but in a different way than how they have historically been used. Today, press releases are the common thread in a multi-pronged attack to gain media coverage for your NGO.

Strategy 1: Emailed press releases

Email your press release to individuals at media organizations. Try to address the individual by their name and include a personal note that shows you have followed their reporting on other stories. This personalized touch may differentiate your press release from other competing requests for news coverage.

Strategy 2: Mailed press releases

Did you know that newspapers, bloggers, and television stations get hundreds if not thousands of emailed press releases everyday? Why should they read yours? Your press release needs to stand out. In addition to emailing it, grab the journalists attention by writing your press release on a large or unusual item and mail it to the news organization. They might not cover your story ... but you can be sure they will at least read your press release.

Strategy 3: Use our NGO's own social media

Post your press release on your NGO's website and at the same time share it through your NGO's supporters by way of an email blast and through the NGO's social media. With social media, do not include the entire press release. For this format, include a catchy title and a link back to the NGO's website where it should be posted. Think about posting a quote on Twitter, photo on Instagram, or a video on Facebook that links back to the complete press release.



Pro Tip #2

Write different press releases for different audiences

Different news outlets have different and distinct audiences. You may need to write variations of your press release, each one highlighting a different aspect of the story, depending on audience.