



How to Work with the Media



Getting a good story about your project into the local newspaper or onto the radio or TV can be great in terms of raising awareness, encouraging people to get involved, raising money and boosting morale. It also makes for good, shareable social media content (see our 'How to Make Social Media Work For You guide').

This guide will help you understand what makes a good story, how to prepare information for the media and give you confidence when speaking to journalists.



Leaflet promoting campaign - The Swan at Gressenhall

What makes a good news story?

Of course, your project is important and interesting to you, but how can you be sure your news will be of interest to a journalist? Use this checklist to see if your story is newsworthy.

Timing: does your story coincide with a national event e.g. Volunteers Day, or can you link it to another local or national news story or issue, or an anniversary?

Superlatives: is your story about something that is the largest, the smallest, the fastest, the oldest? Or have you reached a significant milestone in your project, such as halfway to reaching your fundraising target?

Human interest: focus your story on the benefits to people, not the nuts and bolts of the project itself. The interest is not so much about the project itself but the benefits it will bring to the community.

Conflict or debate: an element of debate between two parties will almost certainly pique the interest of a journalist.

Interesting photo or video: many publications rely on supplied photos. A good image can help boost interest and coverage.

The 'So What?' test: ask yourself honestly, is your story really of interest to others? If not, try to make it more relevant by inserting an element from the checklist above.



Save the pub - The New Inn, Warwickshire

I How to contact journalists

Journalists are busy people working to tight deadlines and often do not leave their offices in order to gather stories. Many source their stories from social media and are avid followers of Twitter and community Facebook pages. They also rely on being contacted directly by phone, email and Twitter.

Do your research to find out which journalists cover your area and are most likely to be interested in your story. Build a simple contact database of phone, email and Twitter details and keep a log of who you contact, when, what about and what the outcome was.

Make sure you know the deadlines journalists are working to: as a rule of thumb, daily newspapers have a deadline of late afternoon the day before and weekly papers a couple of days before publication, whereas for radio and TV timing tends to be based more around logistics and so is more fluid. Bear in mind, that most media have an online presence which means deadlines are rolling 24/7.

Whatever way you choose to make contact with a journalist, make sure you get to your point quickly and concisely and follow the guidelines set out in the next section on press releases.

I How to write a press release

Press releases are one of the main ways to present information to journalists. A release reads like a news story and contains answers to all the questions a journalist may want to ask, mainly: Who? What? When? Where? How? Why? and So what?

A press release can be broken down as follows:

Headline: ideally this will sum up your story in one line that grabs attention

First paragraph: this needs to capture the reader's attention quickly so get to the point of your story and include topline information, not all the details. Give your opening lines the 'bar stool test' – how would you explain your story to your friend in the pub.

Subsequent paragraphs: expand on the topline information in the first paragraph to give context, more detail, statistics and quotes from spokespeople.

Quotes: these can help bring your story to life. Use quotes to tell part of your story not repeat what you have written elsewhere. Use your own project spokesperson but also think about getting a second quote from an influential person not directly connected with your project such as your local MP or councillor, business leader or a funder.

Notes to editors: this is where you put additional information for the journalist which provides further context or more detail if required. This could include a link to your website, a project timeline or details of available photographs or videos.

Contact information: give a name, phone number and email address of the person that can be contacted by the journalist about your story. Make sure that person has seen and read the information being sent to the journalist and is available to be contacted.

I How to prepare for an interview

Make sure you know who will be interviewing you, for what publication or programme, when the story will be published or broadcast and, in the case of radio and TV, if the interview will be live or recorded, face to face, 'down the line' or by video link. See the next section on Giving Interviews

Find out if the journalist will be interviewing anyone else in connection with your story.

Define the three main things you want to get across – these are your key messages and the things you want people to remember.

Think about what questions the journalist may ask and prepare your answers. Make some notes if you need to, but don't read out your answers and don't have your notes with you if you are on TV or video. If they are in your hand you will be tempted to look at them!

I Giving interviews

First, stay calm and don't panic! The journalist wants to get a good story and is unlikely to want to try to catch you out or to challenge you. This is a community project and you are not a politician.

Bear in mind you are talking to one person, the journalist, and you are having a conversation. Talk as if you are having a chat with a friend. If you are on TV, keep looking at your interviewer, not at the camera.

Think about where the interview will take place. If you are doing an interview on the telephone make sure you are somewhere quiet and will not be disturbed. If the interview is taking place via video link or on TV, be mindful of what is in the background – you don't want anything inappropriate or distracting for the viewer.

Think about what you are wearing: jangling jewellery is not good on radio and stripes are not good on TV. If you have a project tee-shirt or badge, wear it.

In a recorded interview you can have several goes at getting it right, so if you get into a muddle or think you could be clearer then ask the journalist to stop recording and do that question again. If the interview is live, however, you must keep going!

Avoid using jargon, technical language or too many complicated details or statistics.

If you are standing up for a TV interview, put one foot slightly in front of other as this will stop you swaying.

Remember your three key messages – and try to get in a mention for your funder if you can!



Wherever you are in the UK, if you are interested in starting or developing a community pub please contact the Plunkett Foundation - **01993 810730**, info@plunkett.co.uk or visit www.plunkett.co.uk to find out how we can support you.

The Plunkett Foundation helps rural communities UK-wide to tackle the issues they face by promoting and supporting community business. In addition to developing and safeguarding valuable assets and services, community businesses address a range of issues including isolation, loneliness, wellbeing, work and training.

If you share our vision for a vibrant rural economy with rural community business as its heart, why not join Plunkett as a member? Find out more about our membership packages [here](#).

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