

WRITING A PRESS RELEASE

What you will learn

This resource explores why press releases are important in helping organisations and campaigns get their story across to a wider public. It helps you to think through what makes a good story and how to frame it in a press release so that a journalist can easily pick it up. It also highlights the importance of strong headlines, quotes, lived experience voices and safeguarding. There is also a guide to structuring your press release and an example which IMIX has previously used to secure press for a local project in Newcastle.

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Purpose of a press release

If you're eager to secure media coverage for your charity, it's crucial to understand the importance of crafting an exceptional and attention-grabbing press release.

A press release serves as a concise yet compelling written communication, conveying the essential facts of a story in the hope of capturing the interest of journalists and prompting them to feature it.

Why write a press release as a charity:

- **Raise awareness:** A well-crafted press release can bring attention to your charity's mission, projects, and impact, reaching a broader audience and raising awareness about the issues you address.
- **Build credibility:** Being featured in the media lends credibility to your charity's work and enhances its reputation, making it more attractive to potential donors, partners, and supporters.
- **Attract donors:** Media coverage can attract new donors who resonate with your charity's cause, leading to increased support and funding for your projects and initiatives.
- **Highlight success stories:** Press releases offer an opportunity to share success stories, beneficiary testimonials, and specific challenges overcome, showcasing the tangible impact of your charity's efforts.
- **Foster Partnerships:** Media coverage can help forge partnerships with other organisations, businesses, or government agencies, enabling collaborative efforts to address social issues and achieve shared goals.



What makes a good story

How do you know if your story is going to be newsworthy?

It's useful to run through the following list to see how many criteria you can tick off.

Recency: The story should be recent and happening now.

Relevance: The story should be relevant to the audience of the media outlet you are pitching to.

Importance: The story should be important to the public.

Human interest: The story should have a human-interest element that will connect with readers.

Timeliness: The story should be timely and linked to a current event or anniversary.

Writing the story for your press release

Headline

Hook readers in with a catchy headline of 55 characters or less – it will grab people's attention and prevent your headline getting cut off by Google search and social media.

Paragraph one

People need to immediately understand what your story is about and why their readers/viewers should care about it. Have you answered the classic questions, Who, What, Why, Where and How? You want it to read like a news story.

Paragraphs 2-4

Broaden your story out further without waffling. Sub-headings and bullet points are useful tools so you don't lose the skim-readers! Remember you can always include extra information in the briefing notes at the bottom of your release.

Headlines that stand out

Most journalists get hundreds of emails every day, so it's a good idea to label emails containing press releases with the phrase 'press release' or 'story idea'. A great subject line is also a must.

Don't try to be clever: most journalists will spend just a few seconds deciding whether something looks interesting. If they don't immediately understand what your story is about, they'll move on to the next thing in their inbox.

So if your story is about the launch of a bike project say exactly that. 'Asylum seekers go for a ride' might sound like a better headline, but may mean nothing to a busy journalist scanning their inbox.

You can also try to adapt your headline to the media you are targeting. Look at the stories they publish and try to emulate.

Top tip: Write the headline to your press release last. It gives you an opportunity to really think about the best way to sum up your story and get people hooked in!



Quotes

It's important to gather compelling quotes for your press release. It's the crucial chance to show insight into the story, present the voices of human experience and allow your audience to connect with them.

Try and include the following people:

Individuals with lived experience of the issue you're highlighting

A **spokesperson** from your organisation

Any additional relevant **experts/commentators**.



Safeguarding!

Remember to check with the people being quoted that they have approved the words you are using in the press release and that they are happy to be named.

If they wish to remain anonymous work with them to create a pseudonym they are comfortable with.

Notes on Quotes

Getting the point across as quickly as possible is crucial so try to keep quotes short and sweet – 2-3 sentences. Journalists will edit out anything they think is unnecessary so it's crucial to get your key messages across.

If you have interviewed someone to obtain these quotes for your press release, think about the most interesting thing they said, what is most relevant to your story, and what might resonate with the audience who is reading/listening/watching.

Notes to editors

Once you have included the headline, story and quotes in your press release, it's time to let the News Editor know what else they can expect.

This is the part of the press release where you put the nuts and bolts of your story, in other words all the elements that the media will need to be able to create a news story for their outlet. A busy producer will really appreciate these details being clearly laid out so they can imagine what the finished piece might look like. Here is what you can include:

Available interviewees

Who is willing to speak to the media? Have they been media trained? If they are people with lived experience of refugee and asylum issues have you done a media safeguarding chat with them?

Filming/photography opportunities

Describe what there will be for the media to see/capture, and if it's an event include the timings and location.

For more information please contact

It sounds obvious but make sure this person will be contactable when the press release is sent out.

Remember to think about...

Newspapers/Online:

What photos can they use?
Can you provide anonymous pictures?

Radio:

Who can they interview and what's their availability?

Television:

What and who can they film?
Where and when? Are you willing to do a live interview? Safeguarding checks?

Briefing Notes

This is where to include extra information, figures and context. You don't want to bog a reporter down with too much detail at the beginning of a press release, so it's great to include it at the end if they want to delve further into the story.

Putting it all together

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate use: (Day, month, year)

or

Under embargo: (date and time you wish this news to be released if sending ahead of time)

Headline

Hook readers in with a catchy headline of 55 characters or less – it'll grab people's attention and prevent your headline getting cut off by Google search and social media.

Paragraph one

People need to immediately understand what your story is about and why their readers/viewers should care about it. Have you answered the classic questions, Who, What, Why, Where and How? You want it to read like a news story.

Paragraphs 2-4

Broaden your story out further without waffling. Sub-headings and bullet points are useful tools so you don't lose the skim-readers! Remember you can always include extra information in the briefing notes at the bottom of your release.

Quotes

Insert 2-3 quotes from your organisation, people with lived experience of the issue, plus any additional relevant experts/commentators. Quotes are a chance to show insight into the story and present that all-important voice of human experience.

Name, Refugee Organisation said:

Name, Asylum Seeker/Refugee said:

Name, MP for XXX/Professor at XXXX/Leader of XXXX Council said:

Notes to Editors

Available interviewees:

Name, Position, Organisation

Name, came to the UK in XXXX from XXXX

Filming/photography opportunities:

Describe what there will be for the media to see/capture, and if it's an event include the timings and location.

For more information please contact:

Name / Organisation / Phone number / Email:

Briefing Notes

An opportunity to include extra information, figures and context.

Press Release Example

PRESS RELEASE

Under embargo – midday 18th November 2021

Innovative project highlights key workers' wasted skills

Ambulance driver, intensive care nurse, chef and a youth worker – these are just some of the skills going to waste in the North East because people waiting for a decision on their asylum claim in the UK are not allowed to work.

The innovative Skillsmatch project was set up in Newcastle by the Welcome Refugee Service (WRS) in 2018. The project gives people seeking asylum the opportunity to create profiles detailing their skills and experience, aiming to match them up with volunteering opportunities with local charities and arts organisations.

It could be anything from Oxfam needing someone with finance skills to help tot up the money from their regional charity shops to the BALTIC gallery needing guides to show people around.

Organisations must be trained and ready to support asylum seekers, with lots of steps taken to make sure volunteers are looked after, understood and treated with respect.

Rachel Jones, Director, Welcome Refugee Service said:

“Skillsmatch involves WRS working in close partnership with a broad range of voluntary organisations out in the community - this has really helped raise awareness and increased tangible support and opportunities out in the community for people seeking sanctuary here to apply their skills and meet new people. It's humanising and empowering at a time when people are totally dehumanised and disempowered by the asylum system.”

“The project also starkly demonstrates the huge range of skills, professions and valuable experience that is brought to the region by people coming here to seek safety, and how these skills are not fully being put to use in our communities and the broader labour market.”

Amir Mohammed, a teacher from Afghanistan seeking sanctuary said:

“Volunteering through Skillsmatch helped me get a suitable volunteer job easily. I have got a new experience about the life in the UK and improved my English skill so far. I feel so sad when I see I have a lot of barriers for getting a job because in my home I used to be a teacher.”

Osman, IT technician and manager from Turkey seeking sanctuary said:

“Skillsmatch means being part of life again and the feeling like you are helping other people is so important. I have got some experience first of all, and secondly I have got self-confidence and hope about future. Personally, I have always been working until I moved to the UK. I find it disgraceful to live with benefits without a work permit.”

Sean Clay, Garden Officer, Scotswood Community Gardens said:

“Joining skillsmatch and welcoming asylum seekers into our volunteer team has been fantastic for the Garden. We have benefitted greatly from our new volunteers' energy, skills, knowledge and ideas. Increasing the diversity of our team has been really positive and so many of our existing volunteers have said how much they appreciate meeting and working alongside people from different cultures and backgrounds.”

Annie Bedford, Producer (Communities), BALTIC said:

“Working with volunteers enabled us to create a better experience for visitors. The volunteers provided excellent support for the facilitating artists, enabling more people to engage with the activities, because of the support and guidance they were able to offer.”

Press Release Example (continued)

Notes to Editors

Available interviewees:

Katie Smith, Director, Welcome Refugee Service

Osman, IT technician and manager from Turkey

Sean Clay, Garden Officer, Scotswood Community Gardens

Filming opportunity:

WRS will be hosting a Skillsmatch Open Day at 11am-2pm on 18th November at their base at West Road, Newcastle upon Tyne NE4 5WR.

For more information please contact:

Katie Smith
Welcome Refugee Service

Tel: 0191 222 5566

Email: katie.smith@wrs.org.uk

Briefing Notes

People seeking asylum are not allowed to claim benefits or work in the UK. If they are destitute and have no other means of supporting themselves, they can apply to receive asylum support. This is set at around £5.66 per day.

Skillsmatch was created in 2018 as a Creative Fuse Innovation Pilot, in a partnership between Welcome Refugee Service (WRS), local creative agency Roots and Wings and Newcastle University Business School and Teesside University School of Social Sciences. The website was developed in close consultation with a group of WRS clients and a range of local organisations.

Originally it received just £5k of seed funding for this initiative, and WRS then secured funding from National Lottery Community Fund - under their Reaching Communities programme.

Over the past three years, it has received matched funding from Shears Foundation, Pea Green Boat via Tyne and Wear Community Foundation, and Newcastle City Council via its resettlement scheme funds.

WRS are now seeking funding to support the project in its national roll out - as the online platform is fully adaptable, and is designed to be used by different charities across the UK.

Since 2019, Skillsmatch has engaged with:

- 40 partner organisations (voluntary organisations in the local community, from art galleries, to outdoor community gardens to charity shops)
- 192 people seeking asylum have engaged with the project so far (since 2019)
- 42 people have taken up longer term regular volunteering roles
- 74 volunteer roles have been advertised
- 250 engagements from people seeking asylum with community group volunteering activities - (this includes individuals who attended more than one group activity)

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