

State Public Relations

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Press/News Release Format

A press release is a news story, written in third person, that seeks to demonstrate to an editor, columnist or reporter the newsworthiness of a particular person, event, service project, or fund raiser.

Today it is acceptable to send releases either by mail, fax, or e-mail, depending on your target media. Regardless of how you deliver your message, make sure it is easy to read and edit. Releases that do not immediately capture an editor's attention will be filed in the office wastebasket.

- Use simple English
- Short sentences
- Short paragraphs
- Include all necessary facts and information
- Announce your news, but do not advertise

You can (1) type a release on plain white paper (8½ x 11 in.); (2) use special preprinted papers with a NEWS headline; or (3) design your own eye-catching release using desktop publishing software. Allow a one-inch margin on all sides, and double-space copy to make it easy to edit. Press releases are written in block style, so no paragraph indentation is necessary.

Introduce every person named in the story. Use first and last name when first mentioned then last name only in subsequent references.

Keep your release to one page if at all possible. If two pages are needed, add a "see over" notation in the lower right-hand corner of the release. Type your name (as person to contact for additional info) in the upper left-hand corner.

Over to the right, across from the contact info, type (in CAPS, underlined) one of the following lines, depending on when you want your release to appear in print: **FOR RELEASE ON (indicate date), FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, or FOR USE AT WILL.**

The Headline or Title should be centered, in all CAPS, and in **bold** about an inch below the contact info. The title of the press release should be short and snappy, and hopefully grabbing the attention of the journalist and impressing them enough to read on.

Tailor the copy in your release after the following example, which illustrates the five W's of journalism: **What, Who, Where, When, Why.** Since editors usually cut copy from the bottom up if a release is too long, place the most important information at the top. The last paragraph should be "short and sweet" focusing on what you want people to do, such as "Call – Attend – Join or Visit the Web site".

The first paragraph of the press release should contain in brief detail what the press release is about. The second paragraph explains in detail: who cares; why you should care; where one can find it; when it will happen. Also, included in the second 'informative' paragraph is generally a quote that gives the release a personal touch. Touchy-feelies go a long way with journalists. Press releases and news stories are boring to journalists without a 'human interest'. The third and generally final paragraph is a summation of the release and further information on your company with the company contact information clearly spelled out.

Use a photograph as often as possible clearly identifying each person in the photo left to right and front to back.

- The timing of the press release is very important. It must be relevant and recent news, not too old and not too distant.
- A follow-up call can help develop a press release into a full story.
- For maximum visibility in your locality, send releases to all papers in surrounding communities. Pay attention to who is writing columns in your newspaper and send a press release not just to each paper's editor, but also to specific departments or columnists.
- A press release can also be used in generating a follow-up feature story. Reporters are more likely to consider a story idea if they first receive a release.
- Include a "call to action" in your release. This is information on what you want the public to do with the information that you are releasing. We always want them to visit our Web site to learn more about your CDA.
- Always remember that editors are overworked and understaffed. If you can make life easier for them, you're more likely to get coverage. If you write a press release that's close to the way the editor will actually publish it, you will have nearly total control of the published work.
- Electronic PR does not differ from conventional PR in that one's ability to write and organize information well is rewarded with press coverage. However, the one-two punch of a creative subject header for your message and a clever "spin" to your news rings extra loud in a crowded inbox.
- Don't trust your word processing program to catch errors in grammar and spelling. Have a few individuals read the release before sending it to a reporter or news agency.
- Use every opportunity available to submit an article about your Court. Special events with a great deal of activity can be separated by topic and submitted weekly for greater coverage.

Daily Newspapers

Business and general assignment reporters working for newspapers and online dailies turn around stories within 24 and 48 hours. However, feature writers are working on stories weeks in advance of publication date. Press Releases about special events or with holiday tie-ins should be sent a minimum of three weeks in advance so the reporter has ample time to research and write the story.

Weekly Newspapers

Press Releases usually have a three day to one week deadline. Always know what your deadlines are.

Monthly Magazines

Monthly publications such as your Diocese Newspapers close editorial content one to two months in advance of the issue date. It is not unusual for writers to be deciding on story content for a December issue in September or October. Stories with a holiday theme should be sent to allow the paper ample time for research and coverage.

When writing your press release, it should be: **Concise - Well-written - Factual - Honest – Timely.**