



This information note is one of a series produced by the Community Woodlands Association. It describes main points to consider and the different steps to go through when writing a press release.

What is a press release (PR)?

A press release is a written news story targeted at members of the media. It consists of key facts, quotes from key stakeholders and contact details for more information. The main role of a press release is to convince the media to cover and develop your story. However, what tends to happen more often (especially with the local press) is that press releases get published almost word for word. A press release needs to stand out as editors and journalists receive a lot of press releases every day.

When should you write a PR?

It is good practice to regularly send press releases on behalf of your community group (at least four times a year). Even though they might not get published, it updates the journalists on your activities and if they don't cover you the first time, they might do the second.

Ideally, it is worth sending a press release when there is "news" happening in your group. Did you receive some funding? Did you organise a successful event? Did you build a new key feature in your woodlands? Are you launching a community buyout?

Do not send irrelevant press release as you do not want to develop a reputation of wasting journalist's time. You need to ask yourself how relevant it is to the context. Is it responding to a growing trend/interest? (e.g. creating a mountain bike track in response to the conclusion of a public consultation).

Is it unusual? Is it breaking the routine of your community? Does it impact people's lives? Is it targeted at the appropriate audience? Is it concise and easy to understand? Remember, some people might not know concepts that you will use (e.g. woodland crofts) and you might want to expand on them to ensure you don't lose the reader's attention.

Why write a PR?

Writing a press release is a key part of effective communication, especially when targeting the local community. It provides cheap advertisement in the local newspapers and when published, creates content for your website and social media, enabling you to reach a wider audience.

Writing a press release is a good idea because:

- It's the best format to get your story to the media.
- It will help you to get your story straight.
- It will provide content ready for you and the media to use.

How to write a PR?

A press release should start with a general sentence which sums up the main news you want to share so it catches the attention of the journalist. You can then add a subtitle giving a bit more detail and expand on the context in the following paragraphs.

10 steps

Follow these 10 simple steps to develop your own press release.

1. Logo: start by inserting your logo at the top of the page. If you don't have one, just use your community woodland group name.
2. Embargo: let the editor know when you would prefer to have it published (e.g. immediate use, by 12th of Jan etc.).
3. Headline: summarise your story in one sentence and make it attractive (e.g. use significant words such as "milestone" or you can use a subtle pun).
4. First paragraph: make sure you cover the 5 "W's" - who, what, why, where, when (and how), tell the main story and make sure you mention why it is newsworthy.
5. Second and third paragraphs: expand on your story with more information, facts and figures.

6. Quote: get a quote from the main representative of the stakeholders in the story you are covering (someone from your organisation and someone external).
7. Closing paragraph: talk about what might happen next and say if there is anything you hope people will do such as signing up to your service, attending an event or donating etc.
8. Ends: write “ENDS” in bold to clearly show the end of the content for publication.
9. Notes to editors: include a ‘notes to editors’ section with bullet points providing:
 - Background information for journalists and contact details such as information about available photos;
 - A link to a research report (if applicable);
 - A brief biography of a key spokesperson;
 - Contact details (email and telephone) for additional information.
10. Additional information/ “boilerplate”: here you can add your public contact details such as your web address, Facebook and Twitter profiles and any hashtags (#) you are using on social media.

Add a short “about us” paragraph that explains your organisation’s aim and a brief history.

What do the media want?

- Great stories – the media is always looking for stories that will capture their audience’s attention. Do you have anything surprising, shocking, inspirational or wacky to say? How does it impact people in a positive way? Try focusing on the story of someone who has taken part in your project.
- Relevance to the news agenda – news stories must be timely and up-to-the-minute. Can you link your story to a current issue in the news? Or is there a link to a calendar date such as International Day of Forests or Earth Day?
- Quick turnaround – journalists are often under pressure to meet their deadlines. If you can make their life easier, your story will be more likely to get more coverage.

Get back to journalists quickly and provide content such as photos and people to interview.

How long should my press release be?

A press release should be no more than two A4 pages. Ideally between 400-600 words. You can expand if you want to give more details but be aware that some crucial information that you want to see in the final article might be cut. In this instance, it’s better to keep the press release short.

Which media should you target?

Think about the people you want to reach. What media do they read/watch/listen to? This is where you need to get your story published. Do not forget the local magazines, local radio stations and in some instances, industry magazines (eg. Forestry magazine) or national media as they might be relevant. Some success stories in community woodlands are quite unique and are worth being covered by a UK-wide newspaper. Don’t be afraid to think big!

How to get your press release out?

Prior to sending a press release, know the publication pattern of the papers you are targeting. It is worth getting in contact with their newsroom to ask when it is preferred for them to receive the press release and when their deadline is.

You should email your press release out to any media you would like to cover your story and that you think might be likely to run it.

Find journalists’ contact details by:

- Looking on their website/ publication
- Calling their office
- Contacting them via social media
- Use your own channels to get your press release out as widely as possible.

Publish your press release on your website, promote it via social media and newsletters and ask other people to share it. Chase up your story: after sending it to the news desk, call them the next day to make sure they have received it.

Media form

Ensure all the quoted individuals or people present on pictures you send have given their consent. To do so, you can ask them to sign a media form prior to the publication of the story/photo.

Plan B

• Publish it anyway: If your press release doesn't get published by all the media you have targeted, publish it on your website or as a Facebook blog post.

• Reader's letters remain the most read section of a newspaper. If you don't manage to get a press release published, you can ask your members to write letters promoting your activities.

Top tips	
Do	Don't
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Write it as a news story in the style of the media you want to cover your story.• Keep the media's readers/viewers/listeners in mind whilst writing it.• Keep your paragraphs short – no more than 5 lines each.• Use simple, everyday language and explain key concepts.• Provide facts not opinion (e.g don't say it is an 'amazing project' but explain why it is).• Offer journalists extra content such as interviews, photos, videos.• Paste it into the body of your email as well as attaching it as it makes it quicker for journalists to read	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make it too long.• Use jargon or abbreviations (e.g. SLF or FLS).• Try to say too much – focus on the key points of the story.• Make your spokesperson's quote boring: it should add something to the release and should be focused on the needs of your target audience – avoid "we are delighted".• Fill up your press release with history and background details: you can use the 'notes to editors' section for this.

Resources

Community Woodlands Association (advice and support for community woodlands)
<http://www.communitywoods.org>

Media Trust
<https://mediatrust.org/resource-hub/writing-a-press-release-and-how-to-pitch-it/>

Resource Centre
<https://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information/news-release/>

Friends of the Earth
<https://campaigning.friendsoftheearth.uk/general-resources/write-press-release>

The Guardian
<https://www.theguardian.com/small-business-network/2014/jul/14/how-to-write-press-release>

This information note was produced by the Community Woodlands Association, and was developed from work undertaken through an internship funded by the Pebble Trust. The work of the CWA is supported by Scottish Forestry. Published May 2022.

