



# Near Neighbours' Toolkit How to use the media

## How to promote your project on tv, radio and in newspapers

Community projects, and particularly interfaith projects, are involved in activities and events that, from time to time, will interest local newspapers, radio, and sometimes regional TV.

With limited resources, the skill is to know when to put energy into promoting your project. This toolkit provides guidelines for effective media coverage to help you to maximise the benefit of publicity.

### What is News?

#### 1. Something New

The media want to be the first to tell us what is actually new. If they think what you have is genuinely fresh and interesting, they will cover it. If it has real originality they may well want an exclusive first run at broadcasting/printing it. So your task is to set up the story so the media want to make it their own.

#### 2. Something Topical

The media react to a number of hot buttons. If a social affairs story, for example, breaks at national level, the local media will look for a local response – often a kneejerk reaction. If the story is about something which reflects your work, you could be the person they turn to for comment. This is free promotion and allows you to build credibility without burning up valuable time.

The media also like to use anniversaries and special events as hooks on which to pin coverage of related projects. So timing is everything. You can find lists of 'special days' on-line - these can make useful hooks for a story.

#### 3. The Ordinary doing the Extraordinary

A local five-a-side team playing at the local premier league club. An interfaith choir in X Factor auditions. A teenager addressing an international conference. Context is everything, too.



### WARNING

**You have just entered the five second zone**

**You have about as long as it takes to read this sentence to grab a journalist's attention.**

Yes, about 15 words - or 5 seconds. Not long, is it?

That's why it's vital to do some serious thinking about how you approach the whole business of media relations.

*So what makes news - and why?*



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## My list of media targets

### 1. Regional TV stations

Name .....

Address .....

Tel. ....

Email .....

### 2. Regional radio stations

Name .....

Address .....

Tel. ....

Email .....

### 3. Regional daily newspaper(s)

Name .....

Address .....

Tel. ....

Email .....

### 4. Local weekly newspaper(s)

Name .....

Address .....

Tel. ....

Email .....



## 4. The extraordinary doing the ordinary

A checkout assistant in a local Tesco store scanning your weekly groceries is not a story. But you scanning the cost in a local supermarket of basic groceries to highlight the challenges of poverty is. Context again.

## 5. Something passionate

Contrary to what is often portrayed, the media go for commitment, passion, belief and faith. What they don't want to cover is 'worthy but dull'.

## 6. Anyone but me, please...

Working for a charity or not-for-profit group probably means you are self-effacing and modest about your expertise and achievements - at least, when it comes to dealing with the media! In fact, getting the message out about your work is a vital part of the job, not an optional extra for an 'expert'. If a story breaks nationally on gang culture, for example, and you have some working knowledge of the issue, the media should be phoning you for help in covering the story. You don't have to have a doctorate in a chosen subject to be a good person to quote!

## 7. Building a list of media targets

Each project will have its own local and regional targets by way of newspapers, radio, TV and increasingly, online publications.

There is a useful website <http://www.mediauk.com/> which lists local, national and regional media.

At a local level it is worth compiling an address list of key newspapers, radio and TV outlets. A phone call to the organisation concerned will usually provide the information you need. Watch, read and listen to local media so you find out which reporters cover stories that are close to your field. Then when you have story – go direct to that person.

## 8. Writing a media release

So what is the best way to secure airtime or column inches?

Put it in writing! News items are best submitted as 'media releases' – generally by e-mail with all the basic information presented in a logical sequence, sent personally to the news editor or the contact you have spotted from the media outlet concerned (see 3 above).

Sounds easy? But there is a catch. Every newspaper, radio and TV newsroom receives a pile of news releases each day. The challenge is to make yours stand out and catch the editor's eye.

## Tips on Producing a News Release

Take a look at the following media release and the key points that follow:

### Media Release

#### Date

#### Attention: Named Contact

#### For immediate release

### FAITH LEADERS SHARE THE LIGHT AS SPARKHILL WELCOMES THE OLYMPIC TORCH RELAY

Faith leaders from across the city will be joining residents in the Sparkhill area of Birmingham for a mass breakfast as the Olympic torch relay travels along the Stratford Road from 6.30 am on Sunday July 1<sup>st</sup>.

The event in Sparkhill Park has been organised by an interfaith planning team and includes breakfast, a mini-Olympics and the launch of a city-wide faith pledge urging people to greater compassion, generosity, forgiveness and hospitality.

More than 1,000 packs of special candles have been prepared for the event and will be distributed across the city as people light them to show their commitment to the pledge and their desire to work together to bring 'hope and joy, friendship and laughter,'.

Breakfast will be on offer from seven different stands including local faith communities and restaurants. As well as enjoying food and hospitality, people in the park will be entertained by a programme being run from the bandstand which includes poetry, folk music, a Bhangra dance group, the Torch Relay choir and a tabla performance.

A specially-commissioned mural will also be showcased at the event. The huge image has been developed by Sparkbrook-based graffiti artist Mohammed Ali working with local young people from Christian and Muslim backgrounds.

Leading the faith pledge will be the Bishop of Birmingham, the Rt. Revd David Urquhart, who will be joined by leaders from the Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, Hindu and Jewish communities.

Bishop David said: "The pledge reminds us that our faiths encourage us to work together for the good of all who live in this wonderful, diverse city and I hope the candles burning in hundreds of homes will remind us of our shared hope for a peaceful, just, and joy-filled city where everyone can flourish and the most vulnerable in our community are valued, respected and treated with dignity and love."

All our welcome to the event at 6 am on Sunday July 1<sup>st</sup> at Sparkhill Park. The torch is expected to pass the park around 6.45pm and the celebrations will continue until 8.30 am.

Ends

#### *Notes to Editors*

Cameras and reporters are welcome on the day.

For further information please contact Jessica Foster, Near Neighbours Development Worker on 07817 853 452

## 1. Think of a title that tells the story to place the top of the release

This is the five-second challenge! Can you grab the news editor's attention enough for him to read right through the release? Don't be disappointed if your title does not appear in print, nor if your release is reworded before publication or broadcast. Media outlets normally like to produce material in their own style.

## 2. Include the basic and possibly dramatic facts in your first paragraphs

Early in your release answer the questions: **When? What? Who? Where? Why?** Write in short sentences and keep paragraphs no longer than a few lines. It should be possible to cut every press release paragraph by paragraph, working back from the end, and for it still to make sense!

### **3. Decide on the most important or interesting feature of your news item**

Include this in the first paragraph.

### **4. Use direct quotes**

A relevant comment from a person directly involved in an event adds interest. If you want to express an opinion, do it in a quote. Direct quotes are unlikely to be edited before publication.

### **5. Steer clear of jargon**

Do not assume that reporters will know the meaning of technical in-terms. If you need to use them, explain them.

### **6. Display 'media release' and your project's name prominently**

It is important that the news editor can see easily the source of the information.

### **7. Add your contact details and make sure you are available to answer follow-up questions**

Local radio may want to interview you on air and ask you to expand on the key points. Put your work and mobile telephone numbers on the release. Note that in the example the word 'ends' marks off the details for publication from those added for the news desk only. This should avoid your telephone number inadvertently appearing in print or being broadcast.

### **8. Keep the release on one sheet of A4 paper, if possible**

Two at the very most. If journalists need more information, they will contact you.

### **9. Date the release to show when it was issued and double check your information before sending out the release**

This is crucial. Make sure postcodes match the address, the dates match the days of the week and all names are spelt correctly,

### **10. E-mail, post, or hand-deliver in good time to all relevant media**

If you send an e-mail, make sure your release is in the body of the message. If you send it as an attachment it stands far less chance of beating the spam filter and being read.

### **11. Follow up your communication with a phone call**

Give your contact a call to make sure they have received your information. In the case of TV and radio, ask who is planning the news articles for broadcast, if your chosen reporter is not available. Then enquire as to whether your event is in their upcoming diary. If they haven't any record of your event, offer to send another email with full information.

### **12. Send information about an event in the future, not the past**

Future events are more likely to win coverage - and you may get coverage after the event as well. If you can supply a picture your story is likely to get more coverage and be used on websites. (see page 5).

### **13. Invite the media to attend your event or activity**

If journalists arrive; have someone specifically appointed to look after them! Remember that most news desks are short-staffed and are unlikely to be able to attend many events. That's why it's best to hire a freelance press photographer to take photos for your event for circulation afterwards - on the 'belt and braces' principle. Which leads on to the importance of making your story visual...

## The photo call

The old saying “one picture is worth 1000 words” applies dynamically to media relations. Wherever possible, make your story visual. It stands a far greater chance of being covered if you do. Here’s what to do:

- **Compose your picture before inviting the media**

The media think visually - even radio. Ask yourself a few simple, creative questions before sending your release such as: How can I sum up the story I am sending in one interesting picture? Who would be in the picture? What would they be doing? What ‘props’ could be included to make the picture more interesting?

- **Don’t leave the news or picture editor to come up with a suitable idea - they are unlikely to have time**

Tell them you are organising a photo call and outline the visual elements that will make the photo worth taking. You might do this at the bottom of your release.

- **Doesn’t suit you, sir!**

Try to avoid a row of ‘smiling suits’. The picture desks are much more likely to take notice of your project if they come back with a well-crafted picture with an activity at the heart of it.

- **Hire a press photographer**

Another tip is to hire a professional freelance media photographer (phone up the picture desk at your local paper for people they would recommend). It will be worth the investment. For a small additional fee the photographer will probably send out the best pic to local and regional media for you, along with a copy of your release.

- **Float in your logo**

If you have a building, or a display stand, with the project name on it, set up the photos so that, on some, the logo is included in the background. The photographer will position you correctly for maximum impact.

- **J-peg - just the job**

These days newspapers expect to receive hi- resolution (approx. 1mb) jpeg images - either on CD or by email for possible publication.

- **Write a caption**

When sending your jpeg, include a caption saying who is in the picture (from left to right) and what **the activity is, along with a contact name and number.**

- **Consent**

When using photos of children and young people you must get the consent of their parents or carers. In fact it is good practice to get the consent of any adult whose image you are using.

**Does this all sound a bit daunting? Then use our step-by-step guide overleaf and simply do things in bite-sized portions at a nice even pace...**





## Your step-by-step media action checklist

### i) Planning

- What are the key elements of the story I want to tell?
- Who are the key people involved, what credibility do they bring to the story and are they happy to be quoted and involved?
- Is my story well-timed? Is there a topical or seasonal 'hook' for my story? If so, what is it?
- Does my story have a "unique" news factor or contribute to a current local or national debate?
- Have I compiled a list of key local and regional media targets and their contact details (see page 2)?
- Does the story have a potential for national coverage? If so, you may want to get the support of someone in an umbrella organisation like Near Neighbours.

### ii) The Press Release and Photo Call

- Have I drafted a release based on the principles on page 3?
- Have I made sure that the relevant people in my organisation have approved the release and that one other person has proof-read it for spelling and grammatical errors.
- If it is a special event/ launch/celebration I am promoting, have I booked a local photographer? (see page 6)
- Have I planned to send out the media release with (at least) several days' notice BEFORE the event?
- Have I arranged who will be in the photo call and the content of the photo for media purposes?
- Have I obtained parental consent to use photographs of children in the project?
- Can the media reach a relevant person by phone, daytime and evenings, before the event- with authority to speak on the project's behalf?

### iii) At the event

- Have you got a press pack available for visiting journalists, containing media release and background info, brochures etc?
- Have I appointed someone to meet and greet journalists/ photographers if they come to the event?

- Have I left time in the programme to be available for questions from journalists?

#### iv) After the event

- Have I arranged with the hired photographer for photos to be sent out to local media? See page 6
- Have I captioned the picture?
- Have I sent out a post-event written release to accompany the photo?

#### And finally... take a deep breath and relax.

Once you have been through the process once, it doesn't seem so arduous. The secret is in the planning and thoroughness of delivery. And if you don't get a great response first time, don't despair. In due course, you will be noticed...

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### What about attracting national media coverage?

All the advice given in this toolkit relates to projects trying to gain some local media coverage. When it comes to National, or trade media, or perhaps faith-based media (e.g. Daily Mail, BBC Radio 4, Third Sector Magazine, Church Times), you might want to get some support.

#### What do I do if a newspaper contacts me?

If its local media and you feel confident that you can handle the query then go ahead and speak to them, but if you have any doubts at all ask someone you know with media experience for advice. If you are being asked a lot of questions ask the journalist what it is they want to know, say you need to just consult a few people and you will ring them back in 20 minutes. This gives you breathing space and the chance to craft your replies, be clear about your message and avoid possible pitfalls.

#### What happens in the unlikely event that we have an unfortunate incident involving our project and the media get to hear about it?

Again you really need to get help in this situation. You must always tell the truth, never speculate and don't guess the answer to questions. Get support and help from your organisation, a faith body or a local interfaith group. Always tell the lead person in your organisation what you are going to say.

Beware, at times like these journalists may not always declare themselves to be journalists and a careless comment made to someone completely unrelated to the media, may still be reported.





