

NEWS RELEASE GUIDELINES

When to Issue a News Release

News releases provide the opportunity to alert media about significant events occurring within your organization. They can be a great opportunity to create free exposure for your system in local newspapers, on the radio or on local TV news.

Anything new or interesting can be the topic of a news release. Some newsworthy possibilities include:

- Receiving a new vehicle or vehicles
- Introducing a new service or service change
- Introducing a special service (e.g., service to the county fair)
- Announcing a significant increase in ridership
- Announcing that new funding has been secured
- Announcing the start of a funding drive
- Doing something that ties in with a national or state event (e.g., Try Transit Day or Earth Day)
- Highlighting a partnership with another community organization (e.g., teaming up with the Boys and Girls Clubs to get kids to their programs)
- Hiring a new employee

The more news releases you issue, the more news coverage you are likely to receive. While every news release you send out will not be printed or aired, the ones you don't send out definitely won't be!

Consider creating a news release calendar. Identify topics throughout the year which are newsworthy and plan to issue news releases on a regular basis – at least once a quarter.

Also keep your ears and eyes open for possible feature story ideas. Newspapers often run feature or human interest stories, which are generally longer, more detailed articles. Rural public transportation offers great potential for feature stories, and you can suggest ideas to your local publications. When you hear about a rider whose life has been really improved by rural public transportation, who uses your service in an interesting way or who has accomplished something special, consider writing a note to the newspaper volunteering to help them develop a feature story about the person. You may even have an employee who would make a good feature story.

How to Write a News Release

Content

Every news release should include the following six elements:

■ FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

These words should appear in the upper left hand corner of the release, immediately under your letterhead.

■ Contact Information

In the upper right hand corner of the release, include the name, title, telephone and fax numbers, and email address of your agency spokesperson. You may want to include a home number as well as work number, as reporters often work after normal business hours.

■ Headline

Create an attention-getting headline that conveys immediately what the release is about and why it is important. This may determine whether your release is read or not.

■ Dateline

The city and state that your release is from and the date that you are sending it. For example: Houston, Ind., October 20, 2007.

■ Lead

The lead paragraph should tell your story in a capsule fashion. It should answer the questions who, what, when, where and why in as few words as possible. An editor or reporter may read no further, so communicate your message right up front.

■ Text

The body of the news release should be used to expand upon the synopsis offered in the lead paragraph. Keep these basic guidelines in mind:

- Organize the information from most important to least important. When space is limited, newspapers cut from the bottom.
- Write in a newspaper style. Use short sentences - 20 words or less. Keep vocabulary simple and avoid jargon. Make paragraphs short, focusing on a single thought.
- Write in a facts-oriented, educational fashion. Do not try to “sell.” If you want to include opinions or interpretations, include them as quotes from an agency official (e.g., general manager or board member), being sure to give the speaker’s name and title.

Format

- To format your news release, follow these guidelines.
- Use 8 ½" X 11" paper with at least one-inch margins.
- The words, “FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE” in all capitals, should be included in the upper left hand corner, under your letterhead.
- The headline should be in boldface type and in title case (first letters capitalized).
- News Releases should always be single sided, and generally no more than 2 pages in length.
- The body of the news release should be 1.5 spaces or double spaced.
- If the news release is more than one page, include the word “more” centered at the bottom of the first page. - more -
- At the end of the final paragraph, place the following symbol to indicate the end of the news release: # # #

Photographs and Enclosures

If appropriate to your topic, include photographs that enhance your story. For example, if you are reporting the arrival of new buses, include a photo of the new bus. If you are reporting ridership growth, include a photo of a bus full of passengers. Photos can be sent via email as digital files, or provided on a CD along with a hard copy release.

At times it may be appropriate to include other enclosures such as a new Rider’s Guide, new logo or new schedule. Be sure these are in a form which can be photographed or scanned easily.

How to Distribute Your News Release

In order to get your news release into print or on the air, you must know who to distribute them to. This means creating a news media list which includes local newspapers, radio station, TV stations (if you have local TV news), community websites and stakeholders who have their own newsletters. Your media addresses should include, whenever possible, the name of the person you want to read your release. To learn an editor’s name, review a copy of the publication or simply make a phone call. Keep an eye on the publications and/or call periodically to update names of your contacts as necessary.

Most news releases these days are distributed by fax or e-mail. Ask each media which is the best way to contact them and make sure you have the correct e-mail address or phone number.

In order to be newsworthy, news releases need to be distributed in a timely manner. Be sure you get them out while the topic is still relevant.

A News Release template follows.

TEMPLATE FOR USE ON YOUR STATIONERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

System Name

Address

City, State, Zip

For More Information Contact:

Name

Title

Phone Number

Email

NEWS RELEASE TITLE – SOMETHING TO CATCH ATTENTION

City, State, Date. The first paragraph of your news release should include all of the most important information – who, what, where, when and why. If the newspaper publishes only this much or the reader reads only this far, they should get the basic point of your story.

To use this template simply replace the “instruction words” at the top with your own information – system name, address, contact person, etc. Everything will then be formatted correctly.

Next include a title or headline that describes the subject of the news release in a way that will get the editor’s attention.

Now write the body of the news release, replacing these instructions. Keep the information newsworthy. News releases are objective statements – never clever or cute. Sentences should be short (no more than 20 words) and clear.

If you want to include opinions or subjective statements, they should be presented as a quote from someone at your agency or community. For example, OATS Regional Manager, Scot Kosky, says “The JARC service to Branson makes it possible for many residents of Stone County to access better jobs.”

Anything new or interesting can be the topic of a news release: a new vehicle or facility; a new service, special service or service change; a significant increase in ridership; new funding or a funding drive; receiving an award; or hiring new personnel.

Keep the release to one page, if possible. End the release by providing a phone number that readers can call for additional information.

###