



Press Release Tips

Post-conviction is complicated, but good news coverage can communicate the issue to readers in a clear and concise way. Press releases generate journalist interest in your story and the event, and are a great way to spotlight your campaign to a broader audience. Here are some ideas for capturing the attention of the person reading your PR.

1. Pique interest early—and get to the point.

How are you grabbing the reader's attention from the get-go? Asking a question, providing a startling statistic, or stating the problem which you intend to fix are all ways to get noticed early and keep their attention past your title line.

2. Is your story actually news?

Before you begin, ask yourself the following questions:

- Would anyone outside my organization care about this announcement? If so, why are they interested in this topic?
- Is this story relevant AND interesting to my target audience?
 - Be sure to include your direct audience (the journalist) and the broader audience (the readers/viewers of your story) in this response.

If you have answered an honest 'yes' to these questions, then read these press release tips. If not, put the press release on the shelf until you have something truly worthwhile to report. No one wants to lose credibility with journalists because they have sent too many press releases that don't contain anything newsworthy.

3. Start with an outline.

Journalists get hundreds of emails and press releases every day. The ideal length of a press release is about 300-400 words, which is only three or four short paragraphs and a couple of quotes. So, start with a 3-4 section outline of the story and then write one or two sentences for each. And remember bullet points are your friend – they make your story easier to skim and make important points stand out.

For example: Press release about your educational awareness campaign around post-conviction rights.

- **What is your event doing that will change the world (not just for you)?** Detail the community benefits of your event or service and give some examples of how it is improving the lives of others or changing the landscape for rights enforcement.
- **What is the best thing about your campaign?** Including a quote from a reliable source either within the organization or someone who has benefited from services provided.

This will provide validation for your organization's work and give readers more confidence in what you're offering.

- **How does this event fit into the larger landscape of post-conviction rights?** Why does it warrant special attention? What are the challenges/obstacles in driving rights forward in the community? Include any milestones overcome, awards received or key personnel who might be newsworthy.
- **Where can readers find pictures of your organization's impacts or services?** Social media is a great source of content for your organization or event, especially if there is a visual component. Post-conviction ideas and stories can be highlighted with a properly formatted image on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter.

4. Quotations, quotations, quotations.

Remember, a journalist may end up using the quote in their story word for word so make sure it includes the main message of your release. It should also read like a real person, and ideally sound like something the person you are quoting would say. **Don't use technical language or buzz words.** If quoting someone in your organization, ensure it is someone who knows their stuff and can answer any media requests if you get some pick up. Keep language victim-centered to reinforce focus on their role in the story.

A good quotation: "We need to be talking more about specific paths for post-conviction rights, because this conversation isn't common in the victims' rights field"

A bad quotation: "The appellate process involving absconding without authorization is of tantamount importance in our amicus curiae."

5. Who is interested in your story?

Victim-centered reporting is necessary for the promotion of victims' rights. Before you initiate contact with a media agency or specific individual, do some research. When researching news outlets, first check on past reports targeting similar stories and how victims were portrayed and their stories were covered by media outlets you've chosen to reach out to/engage with. Do the reporters you'll be contacting have any connection with your story material? Does this story fit in with their subject matter and interests?

Use your network. The media landscape is dynamic and fluid, making it hard to keep up with who is working (or writing) where. Creating and maintaining your own media contact list can be challenging, as the landscape of journalism is constantly changing. There are a few companies that provide [contact databases of journalists](#), analysts that you can search. If you decide to go this route, keep this list updated regularly.

6. I've sent my press release. Now what?

After you've sent your press release, reach out to a few of the journalists or influencers you've identified and sent them a direct message about your release. Use an intriguing (but short) opening subject line (example: "*RE: What post-trial crime victims don't know CAN hurt them*") to increase the chances of your message being read. Paste your release into the body of the email beneath a short executive summary. This makes it easy for journalists to quickly understand what your story is about (and whether they are interested in learning more). What to include: images, links to videos; what not to include: attachments.

Information Compiled and Adapted From the Following Resources:

- [Zelmer, Whitney: "5 tips for writing a press release that gets noticed"](#) Agility PR Solutions
- "[Working with journalists](#)" American Association for the Advancement of Science

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