



BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA®
ORANGE COUNTY COUNCIL

A Guide to Working with the News Media

Tips Prepared for Staff and Volunteers by
the Council Marketing and Public Relations Office

What is a news release?

News releases should communicate key information — the who, what, when, where, why, and how of an event or issue — and contact information to reporters and editors in the news media.

Reporters and editors receive thousands of news releases each week, and they look for accuracy, clarity, brevity, timeliness, and newsworthiness to determine what they will feature in the news.

The Basics

All news releases begin with a headline designed to attract the reader's attention and encourage them to read the entire story.

The most essential information in a news release should be listed in the first paragraph, or lead, of the release. Include as many of the who, what, where, when, why, and how elements of the news item as possible.

The how of a news release answers, for example, how a decision was made, how you will achieve reorganization, how changes will affect youth, volunteers, and the overall Scouting program.

- Who did it?
- What did they do?
- When did they do it?
- Where did they do it?
- Why did they do it?
- Why/how is this special?
 - When was the last time this occurred? Never, is this an anniversary or some type of milestone?
- How did they do it?

The main body of the news release should include significant details that relate to the lead, including quotations and succinct descriptions. Any related, but nonessential information, should appear toward the end of the release. Generally, the last paragraph provides overall information and statistics about the local council, such as territory served, number of youth and adult members, and the location of the Council headquarters. It is also a good place to list a phone number for more information.

For Council level releases we used this paragraph: *The Orange County Council is one of the largest youth-serving agencies in the country serving over 29,000 youth with educational programs that instill values, develop social and leadership skills, and promotes physical fitness and environmental awareness. The mission of the Boy Scouts of America is to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Scout Law.*



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General Rules of Thumb for News Releases

- Brevity is the key. Try to limit releases to one or two pages.
- Never split a paragraph at the end of a page.
- Type "—more—" at the bottom of a page when the release is more than one page in length.
- If a release is more than one page in length, put an abbreviated headline and page number at the top of each page following page one.
- Type "####" to signify the end of the release.
- Verify all names, addresses, and facts before distributing the release.
- Avoid the use of clichés, jargon, or fancy phrases.
- Don't use flowing tributes, flowery descriptions or glowing adjectives when writing your news release.
- Be impartial and objective; try to write the release as the reporter might.
- Use first and last names on first reference. Include titles and descriptions, such as District Chairman, or a person's hometown or age.
- Buy an AP Style Guide to learn the method of writing used by journalists.

News releases should never run more than two double-spaced typewritten pages.

Photos

Good photos greatly enhance a story's chances of being published. Try to limit subjects to three or fewer in a picture and always include their full names. Photos should have subjects doing something—not just staring at the camera.

The Importance of Timing

Timing is of paramount importance. The experts suggest placing phone calls to media contacts about 10 a.m., when most reporters are planning their day, and early in the week, when weekly papers and news bureaus are filling out their story "budgets" for the week. Never call a morning newspaper after 4 p.m.; that's when reporters and editors are busiest.

Remember that most news outlets operate with a very limited staff on the weekend. Stories that occur during the week are more likely to have a reporter attend. News releases that are received on a Tuesday-Thursday are more likely to be opened.

Too often, we tend not to realize the newsworthiness of an event until after the fact. By the time we think, "Wouldn't it be nice to have something about this in the paper?" For local news it might not be too late. Go ahead and send a recap with a photo.

Set a goal:

Establish a goal to send at least one release every month. Repetition leads to recognition. But each must have a news "hook" - something to catch the editor's eye and the reader's interest. It should be in the lead - the first couple of paragraphs.



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Is It News?

- Is it new and different? (Example — A new co-ed Venturing program is being introduced to the community.)
- Is it novel or unusual? (Example — An NBA basketball star is making a special appearance at a Scouting event.)
- Does it represent a milestone? (Example — A local Troop observes its 50th anniversary.)
- Is a significant honor involved? (Example — A local Eagle Scout wins a national conservation award.)
- Does it have an impact on area residents? (Example — The local Scouting for Food drive helps people in need.)
- Is it dramatic? (Example — A local Scout saves a child's life, using skills learned in Scouting.)
- Does it have "human interest"? (Example — An 80-year-old volunteer makes his first trip to Philmont Scout Ranch.)
- Is there a tie-in to a holiday or special occasion? (Example — A Cub Scout color guard is the youngest unit in a Memorial Day parade.)
- If your answer to one or more of these questions is a firm "yes," your story is almost certainly newsworthy.

Interviews

If you are contacted for a radio, television or newspaper interview, here is some advice that may help you:

When a Reporter Calls

- **Return the call promptly.** Understand that reporters are usually working on a deadline. Ask what kind of a deadline he or she is facing.
- **Ask for information.** What is the story about? Which media organization does the reporter represent? (However, it's best not to play favorites when deciding whether or not to grant an interview to a specific reporter. It may seem like a good idea in the short run, but it may damage your relationship and the Council's with reporters in the long run.) When and where will the interview occur?
- **Collect your thoughts.** If a reporter shows up in your office or calls at a time when you need time to research information or flesh-out your opinions, find out the story deadline and ask if you may call back. Follow through.
- **Don't Be Offended.** Be aware that reporters' schedules are determined by the "breaking" news of the day. Do not be offended if an interview gets canceled or rescheduled because a more urgent story arises.



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Preparing for an Interview

- **Focus your message.** Make two or three key points. Reporters rarely have the broadcast time or space to go into great detail.
- **Anticipate difficult questions.** Be prepared to answer the basics: who, what, when, where, how, and most importantly, why? What is the purpose of your work? Why is it important? How does it fit into a bigger picture? What made you interested in this topic? Who will benefit and how? What makes your contribution unusual?
- **Gather facts, statistics or background information.** Have them at your fingertips, or offer to fax printed background material to the reporter in advance. This will help to minimize errors.
- **Practice.** If there's time, write down your key points, make them concise and repeat them to yourself. But don't memorize your message.
- **For TV and still cameras, look your best.** Look in a mirror, if possible just before going on camera. The reporter may not tell you that your collar is folded over or your hair is out of place. Try to wear solid colored clothes.

During the Interview

- **Begin at a basic level.** Avoid technical jargon or acronyms: explain special terms if you must use them. Speak slowly and spell difficult words or names.
- **Don't overestimate a reporter's knowledge of your subject.** When a reporter bases a question on information you believe is incorrect, do not hesitate to set the record straight. Offer background information where necessary.
- **Be brief!** We live in the age of the sound bite. Television and radio stories may use only a 10-30 second cut. The shorter your comments, the less likely they are to be edited. Even print reporters are looking for short, snappy quotes.
- **There are five C's to success:** Speak with conviction in a conversational manner while retaining your composure. Be confident. Remember that you are the expert. Be colorful--tell short stories or anecdotes to illustrate your point. Give examples.
- **Stick to your main points** and do not allow yourself to get drawn too far off on tangents. Most people make the mistake of talking too much. Let the reporter fill embarrassing silence. Repeat your points if necessary to get back on track.
- **Speak in complete thoughts.** The reporter's question may be edited out and your response should stand on its own.
- **Don't limit yourself to answering the questions.** Raise points you think are important. Repeat your main points at least twice.



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- **If you do not have the answer, say so.** Refer the reporter elsewhere or offer to call back with the answer. If you do not understand a question, ask for clarification rather than talking around it.
- **Never say, “No comment.”** Instead, if you cannot or do not choose to answer, explain briefly. For example, “It is our policy not to discuss lawsuits currently in litigation” or “I can't answer that because I haven't seen the article to which you are referring.”
- **Avoid speaking “off the record.”** Assume everything you say may be quoted. If you don't want to hear it on the evening news, you had better not say it.
- **Be honest.** Don't try to conceal negative information, rather let your interviewer know what you are doing to solve a problem. Your credibility and the Scouts are at stake.
- **Illustrate your topic.** Offer the reporter drawings, photographs, charts, graphs or even raw numerical data.
- **Remember to tell the Scouting Story.** The reporter probably does not know very much about the Scouting program. Provide elementary information about Scouting programs, Scouts and volunteers for reference.
- **Keep your cool.** Always treat reporters with civility and respect.
- **Never speculate on the Boy Scouts' official position on an issue.** Unless you have been designated the Council's spokesperson on a topic, stress that you are speaking for yourself, not the organization.
- **Contact Lära Fisher, Director of Marketing and Public Relations.** If you need help preparing for an interview, please call or email before you call the media back. I can also track down the story to make sure you and other people at the Council see the results of your 15 minutes — or 15 seconds — of fame.

Tips for Broadcast Media

- **In edited – not live - interviews, do not answer questions too quickly; pause briefly before answering.** This helps the reporter get a “clean” sound bite and also has the added benefit of allowing you time to think out your answer. It's O.K. to stop and start over again if you don't like the way you worded your answer.
- **Please mention the Boy Scouts of America in the sound bite to ensure that your affiliation with BSA is not edited out of the story.**
- **In a TV interview, look at the reporter and not the camera.** If you're uncertain where to look, ask.
- **Stay stationary in front of radio or TV microphones and avoid sitting in a chair that rocks or spins.** Wandering around or rocking in your chair can cause the recorded volume to rise and fall.

- **Be aware of and avoid nervous habits** such as pen tapping that can interfere with the interview. **Also** be aware of any habits you might have: hair twirling, head nodding, lip chewing, frowning, etc.



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After the Interview

- **Ask the reporter to identify you as being affiliated with the Orange County Council, Boy Scouts of America.**
- **Never ask to preview a story.** Reporters are bound by professional ethics to maintain editorial control over their stories. However, you can ask questions at the end of an interview to test for comprehension. For example, you might inquire, “What do you think is the main story angle here?”
- **Ask when the story will appear.** The reporter probably will give you a general idea, but keep in mind that breaking news could delay the publication or broadcast of your story.
- **Feel free to call the reporter back.** If you feel you gave incorrect information, or if you forgot to make an important point, the reporter will appreciate your call.
- **If you feel an error appears, or if you feel the story was unfair, contact Lära Fisher, Director of Marketing and Public Relations to discuss the matter.** We would like to assist you by letting the reporter know right away. Sometimes a correction can be printed or aired. We also will want to prevent the incorrect information from being used as background for future stories.
- **Give positive feedback to reporters**, if merited, after a story appears. Like the rest of us, they usually hear only complaints and rarely get a call or note to say they've done a good job.
- **Call or email the Marketing and Public Relations Office**, 714-546-4990, ext. 155 or laraf@ocbsa.org to let us know when you've done an interview and how it went, so that we can track down clippings or tapes of your story. If you have a clipping or tape, please share a copy with us.

Council Marketing and Public Relations Resources

Lära Fisher

Director of Marketing and Educational Servicesext. 155

Travis Bush

Director of Public Relations and Graphic Designext. 164

Chamli Tennakoon

Webmaster/Director of Online Development Marketingext. 171



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Marketing and Public Relations

Do you have an unusual story to tell? Get the word out.
Institutional Marketing can spread the word. Call us about:

Op-Ed Columns

Many newspapers rely on academics to put the world and national events in perspective for their readers through the op-ed, or opposite editorial page. After you write your opinion article, The Marketing and Public Relations Office can help you get your article to the proper editors.

Crisis Communication

In addition to communicating positive information about the Orange County Council, Marketing and Public Relations is charged with responding to the media and public when a crisis arises. A rapid, informative response is essential to the reputation of the Council. Please include the Marketing and Public Relations Office among those to be notified when a crisis arises in your area.

Background Information

If you need background information on a BSA program, person or event, or BSA facts and figures, the Marketing and Public Relations Office may be able to help. Our files include news clippings, press releases and photographs.

Scoutweek and other Council Publications

We are always looking for great photos and stories to be included in the weekly edition of Scoutweek, the Council Annual Report, and Council letter and publications. If you have a story to share or a picture that says 1000 words, please send it to us at laraf@ocbsa.org. Also please post your stories and photos on the Council facebook page.