

Tool 5: News Releases

A news release (also called a “media release” or sometimes a “press release”) is an objective announcement directed at members of the news media for the purpose of sharing something newsworthy. It is not intended to be an openly promotional document. It should sound like an unbiased reporter wrote it.

News releases are great to use when you want to communicate something in an easy, straightforward way without having to spend too much time or effort working with the media. The benefits of developing and disseminating news releases include creating credibility for your organization, building a history of your organization’s key milestones, and getting your name in the media.

Here are some reasons why you may develop a news release:

- Announcing new personnel or a new sponsor/funder/partner
- Announcing an event or press conference
- Celebrating an anniversary or major milestone
- Receiving an award
- Introducing a new, unique strategy or approach
- Issuing a statement of position regarding a local, regional or national policy issue
- Meeting some kind of unusual challenge or rising above adversity
- Announcing research results

When crafting your news release, it is important to weave in key messages from your organization and the *Every Body Walk!* message toolkit. To illustrate how to write a news release, here is a template with instructions for each section:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Month XX, 200X

CONTACT: NAME

Title:

Company, (xxx) xxx-xxxx

xxxxx@xxxxxxxxxx.com or .org

HEADLINE, BOLD TYPE, CENTERED

City, State—Begin the release with a heading that includes “For Immediate Release,” the date, a contact person, their title, and a phone number. Space down a couple of lines and insert the headline in bold all-caps.

The headline should be a newspaper-style headline. Most newspaper headlines are complete sentences and written in the present tense (and sometimes in the future tense if you refer to something that hasn’t happened yet.) The headline should summarize your story’s main point and, if possible, mention your organization’s name.

-more-

Begin the body of your news release with a dateline and a dash (for example, “Cleveland, Ohio—”). Datelines give the location of the story. In your first paragraph, include concise, specific, newsworthy information that has a clear local angle. The first paragraph should engage the reader so they continue reading. Ask yourself the traditional “who, what, where, when, why and how” questions. Use the key information from those areas in your lead paragraph. Try to spark the reader’s interest by using a question or an anecdote.

If the release is more than one page long, write “-more-” at the bottom of each appropriate page. At the end of the release, put “###” to indicate the end of the document. News releases are rarely more than two pages, including the heading. Try to keep yours concise and to-the-point, shortening where possible without compromising the story. Make sure to include a quote, interesting proof point, factoid or other notable key information that grabs the reader’s attention and makes your release more interesting.

Send all news releases to specific contact people if possible. Find out who the appropriate editors are at each medium. With newspapers, you’ll typically want to send information to the editor or to a specific contact with whom you have worked in the past. At television or radio stations, you’ll want to send information to an assignment editor or news director as well as to the community calendar editor, if appropriate. Get to know the media in your area if you do not know them already.

When you email your release, paste the text of it into the body of your email. The media will not typically open attachments because they are afraid of receiving viruses. If you are sending a complete media kit, it is customary to mail the information or attach a PDF to an email.

The last paragraph of every release should be a “boilerplate” about your organization. A “boilerplate” is a basic, brief statement that describes your program and acknowledges its supporters.

You may use the America Walks boilerplate along with your own. The following is the boilerplate for *America Walks*:

“America Walks is the only national organization devoted exclusively to making America a great place to walk. America Walks consists of a network of more than 700 partner and allied organizations, working to increase walking and create more safe, accessible and inclusive places to walk. Programs include online technical assistance, community-based workshops, convenings such as the National Walking Summit, federal advocacy initiatives, and increasing financial resources for local action. America Walks also maintains the Every Body Walk! Collaborative, a national partnership focused on increasing the visibility of walking and cultivating consumer demand for more walkable places. More info at www.americawalks.org .”

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