



Writing a press release to create news

Media relations toolkit

Engaging the media to elevate sexual violence prevention

Coverage in local, regional, and national media is important — news coverage across formats keeps communities and leaders up to date on key issues and informs public understanding. When sexual violence prevention practitioners engage the media, it is an opportunity to elevate sexual violence prevention, connect with new audiences, and increase your organization's credibility and recognition.

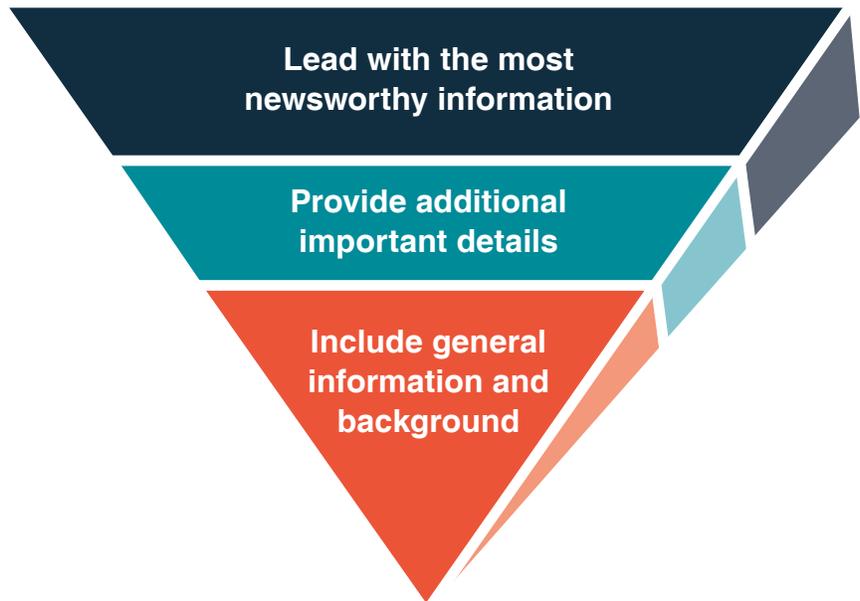
A well-written press release can increase coverage of your organization's sexual violence prevention efforts in the news. For ideas about how to develop newsworthy prevention events, please see *Moving toward prevention: A guide for reframing sexual violence*.¹

In general, a press release should read like a news story. Journalists use the model of an inverted pyramid to show how information in a story should be prioritized. The most important information is highlighted at the top to grab the attention of your readers. It should be easy to skim, and the reading level should be basic. Writing between a 5th to 8th grade reading level is recommended.

In practice, that means:

Being concise. Press releases are typically about 300-500 words. One page is an ideal length; try not to go over two pages.

Inverted pyramid: How information in a story should be prioritized



Finding a news angle. Journalists receive hundreds of press releases, and if your release reads like a news article, it is more likely to be covered. Why is this event or information newsworthy? Who will it impact?

Opening with a clear, compelling headline. The headline should make it clear what the press release is about. Don't worry about being clever or witty – stating clear and compelling facts will grab your reader's attention.

Writing a straightforward first paragraph. Use the first paragraph to summarize everything that will follow. The first paragraph of the press release should answer who, what, where, when, and why. This will hook reporters at the beginning and convince them to keep reading.

Including strong quotes. Use quotes from someone at your organization, typically a leader, to explain the importance of the information you're reporting. Any quotes, statistics, or images you include in the press release are tools a reporter can use to bring their story to life.

Closing with boilerplate language. A boilerplate is a brief description of what your organization is and does. Think of it like an elevator pitch — the way you'd describe what you do in the length of an elevator ride.

Including contact information. Include the name, title, phone number, and email address of someone who can speak to the press in more depth about the topic. The media contact should be available to respond quickly to reporters who are working on deadlines.

Adding finishing touches and formatting. Use letterhead to clearly identify your organization. Create a template for press releases that your organization can use on a regular basis. Remember to proofread and double-check spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

Considering your audience and strategy. Develop a dissemination strategy specific to your message, audience, and goal. Think about the target audience of your message and which journalists and outlets are likely to cover your story. For instance, you may target local and regional reporters, student newspapers, and journalists who cover the topic of sexual violence or a related topic. Or, if your strategy involves a specific audience or field such as educators, you might target trade journals.

Distributing your press release. You can send your press release to a list of journalists via email. Don't forget to include journalists you already have connections with. You can also post your press release on a national wire, which distributes it to journalists across the country. Post your press release on your organization's website, send it in an email blast, and post it on social media platforms.

See next page for a sample press release.

Sample press release

Press contact name

Organization name

Email, phone number

PRESS RELEASE: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[INSERT ORG NAME] to Participate in Sexual Assault Awareness Month Campaign 2018 Theme, “Embrace Your Voice,” Focuses on Expanding Prevention Efforts

As part of the national 2018 “Embrace Your Voice” Campaign, [INSERT ORG NAME] calls on individuals to use their voice to make an impact when it comes to prevention

[CITY, STATE] — [DATE] This April, [INSERT ORG NAME] will [engage/collaborate with/bring together] the broader community as part of its annual Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM) campaign. During Sexual Assault Awareness Month, [INSERT ORG NAME] will bring the theme of “Embrace Your Voice” to life by [Insert a few sentences describing key activities planned in your community, such as events, grants, community outreach, etc.].

This year’s theme, “Embrace Your Voice,” is based on the idea that how you talk about sexual violence matters. Anyone can embrace their voices to show their support for survivors, stand up to victim blaming, shut down rape jokes, correct harmful misconceptions, promote everyday ways to use consent, and practice healthy communications with children.

[Insert QUOTE from your organization’s leadership about what you hope to achieve/how you hope to make an impact as part of your SAAM efforts. Consider commenting on the fact that we all have a role to play in preventing sexual assault, and how that ties into this year’s theme. Use your organization’s talking points to shape your message.]

Beyond SAAM activities this April, [INSERT ORG NAME] leads a wide range of initiatives to prevent sexual assault. These include [insert information on relevant programs and activities].

SAAM is organized nationally by the National Sexual Violence Resource Center.

About [INSERT ORG NAME]

[Insert boilerplate language about your organization, including your website]

References

1. Berkeley Media Studies Group, & National Sexual Violence Resource Center. (2018). *Moving toward prevention: A guide for reframing sexual violence*. Retrieved from <https://www.nsvrc.org/moving-toward-prevention-guide-reframing-sexual-violence>

© 2018 National Sexual Violence Resource Center and the Berkeley Media Studies Group, a program of the Public Health Institute. All rights reserved.

www.bmsg.org • www.nsvrc.org