

Media Moments

The media is a resource to get the message out. Getting your story into the local press means people who are not familiar with conservation districts may take notice and become a supporter. Consequently, developing a relationship with reporters and becoming identified as a source for good stories is important.

Typically press releases are used to relay information to the media. Learn what interests particular editors and slant your press releases accordingly. If possible get to know your local newspaper's editor and environmental reporter, and address the press release specifically to them. Many press releases never get read because they are sent to the wrong person or to an erroneous address.

A press release should announce something new and be based on an issue important to the reader or listener. When writing your press release, give it an exciting headline or title to peak reporters' interests. Make sure you put the reason your story is newsworthy in the first paragraph. Answer the 5 W's and 1 H - Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How? - in the first sentence or two. A quote from a director or staff person in the middle or end of the press release will bring the story to life, but make sure the quote says something relevant in a concise manner. Include the first and last name of the person quoted and their title or position in the organization. Remember that your media release will be competing with many others submitted each day. Keep the release succinct and limited to one or two pages. Always include the name and phone number of a contact person. If possible, follow up with a phone call to make sure your press release was received and not lost on someone's desk. Thinking like a reporter and using visual aids such as pictures also helps get your message across to the masses.

As you begin to develop a media contact list, computerize it into a database including the name of the reporter, the name of the media source, the e-mail address, the telephone number, fax number, and postal address. If you are working with other groups, ask them for their media lists to compare names and media outlets. Keep your list updated by keeping files of press clippings and adding new reporters to the list when you see new names are covering your stories. Don't be exclusive in your media list. It is far better to inform disinterested people than to miss out on reporters who might want to cover your events.

When distributing information to daily newspapers with a large circulation, make contacts with reporters who have given you positive responses in the past, and develop a rapport with reporters who normally cover environmental issues. If you don't know any reporters at a particular media source, introduce yourself to the news editor and ask for their suggestion on contacts from the news desk or other related departments. These relationships should be developed and will become invaluable when you are interested in promoting a conservation district activity. If you live in a more urban or suburban area, you may also want to foster contacts with other media forms such as radio, TV, and wire services. Finally, do not underestimate your local weekly newspapers, which are read thoroughly by county citizens. Make sure you include them in your distribution list.