



# MASTERING MEDIA RELATIONS: HOW TO TELL YOUR STORY



Crystal Davis  
Ohio School Boards Association



# PRESS RELEASE BASIC TRAINING





# Why a press release?

- Sometimes, the best way to get your message to the media is in writing
- Press releases allow you to communicate with precision
- Press releases give you time to think out your message
- Press releases reduce the chance of being misquoted or misunderstood
- Press releases increase your likelihood of media coverage
- Press releases can be shared or easily modified for distribution to parents, students or you school community, which allows you to tell your own story





# Getting started

- Identify local, regional media outlets and create a list of contacts
- Determine what you are trying to say in your press release — what is the primary message?
- Try speaking out loud and delivering that message in a conversational sentence or two



# Press release tips

- Give the media the five W's and one H: Who, what, when, where, why and how
- “What,” “when” and “why” are usually the most important



# Press release tips

- Write your news release in terms of why a reader or viewer would be interested in your story
- Are your students performing outstanding academic achievements or community service?
- Have your teachers or administrators been recognized for their hard work?
- Is your district doing something new or innovative?
- Is your district doing something to cut costs?
- Does your district have a noteworthy event or tradition that deserves attention?
- Did your school board make an important decision?



# Press release tips

- The most important thing: keep your writing concise
- Use simple language and cut out jargon
- Consider every word — especially adjectives and adverbs — and ask if it can be removed
- Try to keep your press release to one page if possible



# Press release tips

- Use simple examples to illustrate complex ideas, especially with data-driven topics
- Keep tone upbeat and positive. Toot your horn, but don't go overboard
- Include a short quote in press releases whenever possible





# Press release tips

- Write in inverted pyramid style — start with the most important information
- Use complete names and proper titles in your press release
- Always include contact names and phone numbers where they can be reached; include an after-school contact number if content is timely
- Write a simple headline for your release that sums it all up — do this last



# Press release tips

- Read, reread then read again for proper spelling, grammar and punctuation
- Email, fax, mail or hand deliver press release to media outlets based on their preferred method
- Timeliness is critical — don't promote stale news. Give reporters enough warning of an event, but not too much warning
- Follow up with media outlets to make sure they received release, answer any questions

# Sample news release

**Smithjones School District**  
1122 Main Street  
Anytown, Ohio 55555

Date, contact → January 21, 2000  
Contact: John Stevens  
Phone: (555) 555-5555

First two paragraphs: Who, what, when, where, why and how. → **Stevens urges renewing tutoring program**  
Because of improving scores by Smithjones High School freshmen, Smithjones School Board President John Stephens is urging his district to continue a successful afterschool program for at-risk students.

Use complete names and titles → The program, funded by the board in January, is up for renewal at Tuesday's school board meeting. The meeting will be at Smithjones Administration Building.

Start with the most important of these pieces of information. Often, the most important of these is why. → High school freshmen have improved their scores on the state-mandated test an average of 7% since the afterschool program was initiated. The program offers students one-on-one help from teachers, who are paid through a special fund set up by the school board.

Use specific examples: → "The results of this program are the proof in the pudding," Stephen said. "Cutting funding now would be the worst thing we could do for those students working so hard to pass these tests."

Use strong quotes: → Nearly 32 students enrolled in the afterschool program have passed the proficiency tests.

Be concise → --- more ---

Indicates news release continues → ---30---

Indicates end of news release →

# Press release example

The Linworth Forum on *Life After Linworth*  
March 20, 2013

The Linworth Forum is an educational project of the Linworth Alternative Program (AP) designed to practice the belief that students “learn the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to live successfully in a changing world... by establishing a learning environment which reshapes the traditional use of time, place, resources, and instructional practices.”\* The AP community is inviting Linworth graduates to explain and discuss elements of Life After Linworth. On Wednesday, March 20, all Linworth classes are cancelled and students will be afforded the opportunity to learn from and question a variety of guest speakers.

\*Worthington Schools Mission Statement



# Press release example

- Who: Linworth Alternative Program, a Worthington City School
- What: The Linworth Forum, an event about life after high school
- When: March 20, 2013 from 8 a.m.-3 p.m. and 7 p.m.-8:30 p.m.
- Where: Linworth Alternative Program, 2075 W. Dublin Granville Road, Worthington, OH 43235
- Why: To teach students about careers and life experiences after high school
- How: High school alumni will appear in person at the school and via Skype from locations around the world to talk to students



**Linworth Alternative Program**  
Worthington City Schools  
2075 West Dublin-Granville Road • Worthington, OH 43235  
(614) 450-6900  
www.linworth.org

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

DATE: March 13, 2013  
Contact: Chris Hasebrook,  
Linworth Alternative Program director  
(614) 450-6900  
chasebrook@gmail.com

**Linworth Forum connects high school students with accomplished alumni**

WORTHINGTON — Alumni from across the country and around the world will speak to Linworth Alternative Program students during a unique, all-day event at the school designed to prepare students for life after high school.

The Linworth Forum is an experiential education activity that brings engaging speakers to Linworth students. Classes will be canceled on Wednesday, March 20 and the school day will be divided into five 60-minute blocks with speakers for students to see in a conference-style format.

“With 40 years of graduates, we have an excellent pool of experience, passion, and personal growth. Tapping into that resource is a no-brainer. And these speakers have a unique understanding of the life of a Linworth student. Giving our current students a look into what their future may hold makes this event even more exciting,” said Linworth Alternative Program Director Chris Hasebrook.

The theme of the forum is “Life After Linworth.” More than 25 accomplished Linworth graduates of all ages will speak at the event and share their professional and personal experiences. While many speakers will appear at the event in person, a number of out-of-town speakers will present at the forum via Skype, including several living outside the country. Linworth alumni Andy Politz, class of 1978, will deliver the keynote address during the evening portion of the forum. Politz, a Columbus resident, has taught outdoor education at Linworth for years and is widely known for his expeditions, including several climbs up Mount Everest.

Linworth alumni, parents and members of the media are invited to attend to the Linworth Forum, which is intended to unite the school community. Linworth Alternative Program will celebrate its 40th anniversary this summer. The Linworth Forum was jointly organized by the school and the Linworth Alumni Partnership, a newly formed nonprofit group designed to connect alumni and support the school.

For more information about the Linworth Forum, Linworth Alternative Program or Linworth Alumni Partnership, contact program director Chris Hasebrook at (614) 450-6900 or [chasebrook@gmail.com](mailto:chasebrook@gmail.com). The Linworth Forum supports Worthington City Schools' mission statement, which states students should "learn the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to live successfully in a changing world... by establishing a learning environment which reshapes the traditional use of time, place, resources and instructional practices."



# Honing the Lead

- **The effective story lead meets two requirements:**
  - ✓ **Captures the essence of the event quickly**
  - ✓ **Cajoles the reader or listener into staying awhile**
- **The lead sentence usually contains one idea and follows the subject-verb-object sentence structure for clarity. It should not exceed 35 words.**



# **Honing the Lead**

## **Two basic lead concepts:**

- ✓ **Direct:** This lead tells the reader or listener the most important aspect of the story at once. It is usually used on breaking news events.
- ✓ **Delayed:** This lead entices the reader or listener into the story by hinting at its contents. It often is used with feature stories.



# **Types of Leads**

## **Summary Lead**

- **Meant to give a reader a quick summary of the story in as few words as possible, usually in one sentence**
- **Contains the essence of the story (i.e. the most important, but not necessarily all, of the 5 W's and H**
- **It cites the source of any opinions**





# Types of Leads

## Summary Lead

- ***Example:***

✓ ***WASHINGTON — Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan told Congress yesterday that U.S. economic growth appeared to be slowing, heading off for the moment any need to raise interest rates. Wall Street responded with a cheer, sending stocks and bonds soaring.***



# **Types of Leads**

## **Single-Item Lead**

- **Focuses on just one or two elements of a summary lead for a bigger punch**
- **Example:**
  - ✓ **When the Philadelphia Phillies won the 2008 World Series, their first championship since 1980, a story posted online by the AP began with this single-item lead: *“The Philadelphia Phillies are World Champions again”***



# **Types of Leads**

## **Delayed Identification Lead**

- **Sometimes with summary leads, you don't always want to identify the “who” right away because the subject doesn't have much name recognition, nor do readers care that much about the subject's name**
- **So, use a descriptive pronoun to identify the person in the lead. Provide his specific name and title in a later paragraph**



# **Types of Leads**

## **Delayed Identification Lead**

- **Example:**

- ✓ ***LINCOLN, R.I. — A School Committee member has filed an assault complaint against a fellow member, accusing her of grabbing her nose and twisting it following an executive session Thursday night***



# **Types of Leads**

## **Creative Lead**

- **Example: A late spring snowstorm surprised forecasters and drivers Tuesday afternoon, triggering more than 30 accidents, Cleveland police officials said.**





# **Types of Leads**

## **Short Sentence Lead**

- **Uses one word or a short phrase as a teaser for the rest of the lead. Readers may find this gimmicky, so use this approach sparingly.**
- **Example:**
  - ✓ ***One-fifth of an inch. That's all the snow it took to trigger more than 30 accidents on local roads yesterday as a late spring storm snuck up on Cleveland motorists.***



# **Types of Leads**

## **Analogy Lead**

- **Makes a comparison between an issue or event you're writing about and something more familiar to the average reader**
- **This approach can work well when you have a complex or foreign matter you want to explain in laymen's terms**



# **Types of Leads**

## **Analogy Lead**

- **Example:**

- ✓ ***AMSTERDAM -- The Netherlands is considering anti-terrorism laws that make the United States' Patriot Act look like a civil libertarian's dream come true.***



# **Types of Leads**

## **Wordplay Lead**

- **A clever turn of phrase, name or word. Be careful using this lead because it can mislead the reader. The reader may think your story is about one thing and then discover it's about something else.**



# Types of Leads

## Wordplay Lead

- **Example from a story about a fire at a costume store:**
  - ✓ ***PAWTUCKET, R.I. — Bill Clinton will finally get taken to the cleaners. So will Dracula and a Playboy bunny.***





# Types of Leads

## Scenic Lead

- **Begins with a description of the scene surrounding an event. It is typically used for stories in which the setting is prominent, such as stories about festive events, performances and sports.**



# **Types of Leads**

## **Scenic Lead**

- **Example:**
  - ✓ **The audience roars its approval as the music slows and the curtains begin to close. It's the end of just another workday for teenager Chelsea Rittenhouse. At 18, the Howell resident is the youngest member of the New York Theater Ballet.**



# **Types of Leads**

## **Storytelling Lead**

- **Begin by introducing the main characters, the conflict, and perhaps the setting of the story. Make readers feel the drama and want to know what's going to happen next.**



# **Types of Leads**

## **Storytelling Lead**

- ***Example:***

- ✓ **Dennis Grehl and a co-worker complied. Dreamlike, he found himself lying face down on a cold, gritty black-tile floor, a pistol against the back of his head.**
- ✓ **Mr. Grehl is a pharmacist, unassuming, mild mannered. A family man with a wife and a daughter. He was being robbed.**



# **Types of Leads**

## **Amazing Fact Lead**

- ***Example:***

- ✓ ***WASHINGTON -- Sixty percent of Americans oppose the U.S. war in Iraq, the highest number since polling on the subject began with the commencement of the war in March 2003, according to poll results and trends released Wednesday. (CNN)***



# **Types of Leads**

## **Startling Statement Lead**

- ***Examples:***
  - ✓ **LINCOLN, R.I. – The first thing Elizabeth Moon sees in the morning is the room where her father was beaten to death. his bed, bludgeoned with a lamp.**



# **Types of Leads**

## **Opposite Lead**

- ***Example:***

- ✓ **Facebook rots the brain, according to a report by a Stansbury University psychology professor. Jim Wallace, honors student and an avid user of the popular website, says that just isn't true.**





# Types of Leads

## List Lead

- **impress the reader with a longer list.**
- ***Example:***
  - ✓ **There's a special restaurant that funeral director Lincoln Ragsdale Jr. likes to visit for breakfast, but it's 115 miles away from home. He climbs in his Beech Bonanza A-36, and an hour later, he's eating pancakes in Sedona.**



# **Ghostwrite for spooky success**

## **What is “ghostwriting?”**

- ✓ **To write for another who is the presumed author**
- ✓ **Write for the media and happily allow them to take credit for it!**



# **Benefits of Ghostwriting**

- **Facts are “spoon-fed;” reduces risk of inaccurate reports**
- **Ease of use — provide charts, pictures, stats to make it as easy as possible for the reporter**
- **High success rate, especially with smaller papers**
- **Whether the info is used or not, your district will be building rapport and credibility. Submit story again if it is not used and is “golden”**



# PROACTIVE PROMOTION TACTICS

WELCOME TO OUR DISTRICT

**OUR DISTRICT IS THE  
BEST EVER AT  
EVERYTHING BECAUSE  
WE SAID SO!**







## **A new view of the media**

- **Media can be a valuable tool for your district, whether managing bad news or promoting positive stories**
- **Don't see reporters as adversaries. They need you, you need them. Work together!**



# **Why pitch stories to the media?**

- **Generate praise for your district (& you) more often!**
- **Build rapport/trust with the media & public**
- **So the community remembers good news during times when bad news is in the forefront**



# **The best way to deliver a message?**

- **Know your chain of command for handling media interviews/requests and react accordingly**
- **The best way to handle a situation may be to provide the spokesperson's or superintendent's phone number and say, "I am not authorized to give details at this time..."**

**What to say to never be misquoted?**





The implications of misstatements...

**ARE HUGE!**

- **Could seriously hurt your district's reputation**
- **Could seriously hurt your reputation**
- **Could cost you your job!**



# **It's all about the “Hook”**

**Reporters/producers have to be hooked first!**

- **Know how a reporter thinks =**
  - ✓ **great interviews**
  - ✓ **shift focus to positive (“twist” the story angle)**
  - ✓ **hook them on your message/story**
  - ✓ **meet their deadlines & build rapport**
- **Develop relationships with reporters, producers, editors, assignment editors**
- **Be accessible (even when the news is bad)**



# The Hook

- **Send your news release, then follow up with a call, personal email, or both and tailor the pitch to the media outlet's needs**
- **Know their limitations in terms of resources and make covering the story easy for them**
- **Be proactive!**
- **Reporters like to talk to people who don't use a lot of jargon**



# **The Hook**

## **Remember:**

- **Hone the lead**
- **Ghostwriting is a powerful tool**



# Adjust Your Hook



- **Print** — Ghostwrite the story for them and allow them to take credit. Reporter has more time, space to tell story. Can be more in-depth and analytical



# Adjust Your Hook

- **Radio** – Talk about the great sound they will get. Have an expert on the subject prepared to explain a complex issue in everyday terms. Tighter deadlines than print & shorter stories. Limit your answers to 15-30 second “sound bites”
- **TV** - Talk about visuals and offer stand up suggestions. They look for splashy sound bites. Keep answer less than 20 seconds





# Media Interviews

## Other helpful handouts:

- **Keys to getting your message out — handout 7**
- **Media interviewee's Bill of Rights — handout 8**
- **Flagging your ideas – handout 9**
- **Bridging — handout 10**





# **The Hook**

## **The follow up**

- **If they covered the story and covered it well, thank them**
  - ✓ **Offer to meet them for coffee to cultivate the relationship**
  - ✓ **If they misquoted you or did not cover the story as favorable as you'd hoped, kindly ask them why. Ask if there is anything you can do to clarify or fix the misunderstanding, or get a retraction**
    - ◆ **Retractions rarely happen, but it doesn't hurt to ask!**



# The Hook

- ◆ **Remind them that you would be glad to continue to be a trusted source for future stories**
- ◆ **Continue to feed them positive stories about your district. Reporters are always thankful for ideas, even if they aren't able to "cover" all of them. This builds rapport!**
- **Enlist employee's help by encouraging them to think about news value of planned activities in the district. Call reporters well in advance of event!**
- **Tell reporters you will contact them when you have something newsworthy, ask what kinds of positive stories they'd like to hear about**



# **The Hook**

## **Perfect pitches**

- **Pitch in a way that suits the media and reader/viewer/listener. Does it pass the “so what” test?**
- **Pitching with a “hook” means timely, new, and interesting. Tell me something I haven’t heard before**
- **Pulls at the heartstrings. Who doesn’t cheer for the underdog?**
- **Impacts a whole community**



# **The Hook**

## **If you strike out...**

- **It may have been a busy news day – pitch again**
- **If they won't cover your story, ask them to retweet it for you, or link to your website story from their website**
- **Change your pitch:**  
**[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hzgzi\\_m5m7oU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hzgzi_m5m7oU)**



# Promotion Tactics

- For the best chance of getting your story on TV and radio, get to know the **producers, reporters, editors & assignment editors** on different shifts. Call & ask for names, phone numbers & email addresses
- Reporters are generally assigned to work the same shift and beat. Get to know the education reporters!



# **Promotion Tactics**

## **Newsroom Meetings**

- **Determine daily/special report assignments**
- **TV & radio staff — meet in the AM and afternoon (usually 9am & 2:30pm)**
  - ✓ **Explains why reporters call at 4pm & expect you to stay late for an interview**
- **Print — generally one meeting per day**
- **Often mandatory that reporters bring 3-5 story ideas. If you provide newsworthy story ideas regularly, they will think of you as an ally...and think twice before burning you!**



# **Promotion Tactics**

## **Newsroom Deadline Considerations**

- **TV & radio — required to report for multiple newscasts**
  - ✓ **Example: Columbus ABC/FOX affiliate has news from 4:30-10am, noon-1pm, 5pm-7pm, 10pm-11:30pm**
  - ✓ **Average radio newsroom = 3 employees**
- **Print — usually working on several stories at one time**
  - ✓ **Reporters typically turn in 1-2 stories at the end of each business day for print**
- **All — Editors may change story considerably**



# Promotion Tactics

## Television Best Chance For Coverage

### Morning News

- ✓ **Pitch live interviews to the shift producer!**  
**In bigger cities especially, they have HOURS to fill for the morning shows...so this is your best chance of getting your positive press on the air and becoming known as a subject matter expert!**
- ✓ **Pre-plan, line up interviews, gather pictures and make it easy for them to run your story**





# Promotion Tactics

## Radio Best Chance For Coverage

### Morning News

- ✓ Again, there is a lot of time to fill and these reporters generally have to pull stories together in the shortest timespan
- ✓ Offer to call in for phone interviews that are in your district's area of expertise. Try to position your team as “go-to” experts



# **Promotion Tactics**

## **Print Best Chance For Coverage**

### **Weekends, Holidays & Small Papers**

- ✓ **The newest employees work on the weekends and holidays and typically need help coming up with story ideas**



# **Promotion Tactics**

## **Think small for large success!**

- **Include small papers/publications/radio and TV stations in neighboring cities, counties, etc., in your media contact list**
  - ✓ **They are always looking for “local” news and are more likely to include positive stories because they have space/time to fill with a smaller staff**



# Promotion Tactics

## Pitch Sidebars

- **Reporters usually have to repackage stories for later newscasts. That means they may take different angles on the same story = opportunity! Pitch them a positive “sidebar” story that they can shoot/write/record while they are at your district**
  - ✓ **Sidebar stories make reporters look like they went above and beyond while making you look doubly fabulous, too!**



# **Promotion Tactics**

## **Timing Your Pitch**

- **Timing is everything! Know what time to send your release based on when you'd like it to air/be published**
  - ✓ **General rule of thumb for TV & radio — 5 – 8 hours**
  - ✓ **Paper — night before or morning of event**
- **Pitch your story more than once, if not time sensitive. A slow news day may help your story rise to the surface**
  - ✓ **If breaking news cancels your interview, pitch again immediately, if applicable**



# Promotion Tactics

## Timing Your Pitch

- **If you can, release your story in the middle of the week. Weekend news crews are small and typically pursue primarily breaking news or “the story of the day”**
  - ✓ **Mondays aren’t ideal because newsrooms may have a pile of news to choose from from the weekend. Fridays, well, do you pay attention on Fridays?**



# Thank you!

## Questions?



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Crystal Davis  
[cdavis@ohioschoolboards.org](mailto:cdavis@ohioschoolboards.org)