

New  
Jersey **4-H**

## Leader Training Series



### How to Write a News Release

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Newspapers, radio, and television are excellent media for letting the public know about 4-H and the accomplishments of participants. A *news release* is an effective, accepted way to share information about 4-H with the media. One can be easily prepared by 4-H staff as well as volunteers. Here is an overview of the main considerations in preparing and distributing a news release:

### News Story vs. Feature Story

There are two main types of stories. A *feature* story typically covers a human interest subject and is more in-depth. A news story gets right to the point with *news*. This is an important distinction. Anyone can write a news release to send to local media, but a feature story is usually done by a reporter. However, a news release written by you may alert a reporter to write an in-depth feature story about the news you have announced.

### What is news?

News is different things to different people. However, the decision as to what makes the news in the media will be decided by the reporters and editors of the media. Before you prepare a news release, try to consider the story from the reporter's perspective. Make sure it's *newsworthy*. Pay attention to what the media see as important and try to give them stories that fit their interests and needs. Remember to focus your efforts on *local* media first. Local weekly newspapers and small, local radio and cable television stations are much more likely to cover your story than larger, daily, regional newspapers, or big-city radio and television stations.

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*Written by: Keith G. Diem, Ph. D.,  
Affiliate Extension Specialist in  
Educational Design, 1990, revised  
1994*

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## Two kinds of news releases

News releases can be written to promote an upcoming event or as a follow-up report to something that already happened. Although many media people prefer the advance-notice stories, some events, such as the receiving of an award, can only be reported after they occur. Find out which type of articles your local media prefer. Either way, plan ahead and be sure to give enough notice. After all, *old* news is no longer news at all!

## Develop a list of local media

Create an accurate list of local newspapers, as well as radio and television stations. Don't forget other organizations and institutions which may be interested in your news. Examples might include schools, local government, etc. Your county 4-H office may already have such a list. If not, there are also various printed directories of local media. You can also check the telephone directory or look for the address of where to send news to local newspapers in the newspapers themselves, and call radio and television stations for this information. Be sure to keep your list up-to-date: media people typically change positions and employers frequently.

## Prepare news releases using an "inverted pyramid" style

An *inverted pyramid* means that you put all the most important information first in the news release. It helps the editor/reporter decide quickly if the article is newsworthy. It later helps readers decide if the story is relevant to their interests. Here are some tips in preparing a news release using the inverted pyramid style:

1. Date the article.
2. List a contact person's name, address, and telephone number.
3. Devise a suggested title or headline for the article.
4. The first paragraph should include all the necessary information, referred to as the "five W's"
  - Who
  - What
  - When
  - Where
  - possibly Why and How.
5. Succeeding paragraphs can include additional details of How and Why.
6. Include local names and city of residence whenever relevant. Local media especially like to mention names in their circulation/broadcast area.
7. Be sure to include the contact person's name and address/telephone number in the article as appropriate.

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8. Besides more information about the 4-H club or event being featured, include the address and/or telephone number of the county 4-H office. In other words, promote *all* of 4-H while you have the opportunity.
  9. Integrate the non-discriminatory statement somewhere into your news release.
  10. Some radio and cable television stations will require a specific format, usually in shortened, outline form instead of a standard news release.

### **Follow-up personally with your news release**

Most times you will be mailing your new releases. However, if you can (or if the story is extra important), deliver it personally to the local media office. If you don't, follow-up your mailing with a telephone call to the local reporter or editor for best results. To do this, it is helpful to know these people: so make it a point to get to know them.

### **Involve media people regularly in what you do**

The best way to help attract and maintain positive coverage of your events and activities is to involve local media representatives in your program all year long. Don't just invite them to attend; invite them to come and *do* something. Examples include judging 4-H projects and contests, serving as emcees for special events, members of advisory boards, etc.

### **Other tips for working with mass media**

- Return calls from mass media representatives as soon as possible. Call them back again if you have to get facts.
- Write *constructive* letters to editors to thank them for good coverage/accurate stories as well as to "correct" inaccurate stories.
- In an interview situation, try to redirect a misguided question to give *your* story. Avoid making long statements that might get cut in length and, therefore, be printed/aired out of context. Think *sound bite* (10-20 word thoughts at a time).

### **Examples of news releases**

Examples of pre-event and post-event news releases are included in this information sheet. Typing your news releases will increase the acceptance of your information. However, if you absolutely cannot type them, either *print* very *neatly* or telephone the information in.

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# SAMPLE #1

(Advance-notice article)

4-H NEWS RELEASE

May 17, 1992

Contact: Chris Clover, Leader of Greentown 4-H Club  
4 Clover Way, Greentown, NJ 44444 (555) 444-4444

Greentown 4-H Club To Hold Open House, June 19

The Greentown 4-H Club will hold an Open House on Friday, June 19, from 7:30 to 9:00 pm at the club leader's home on 4 Clover Way. The purpose is to attract new members. The admission is free and refreshments will be served. Parents are encouraged to attend with their children.

The club normally meets the first and third Tuesday of each month at 7:30 p.m. at Clover's home. The club's projects include woodworking, science, and bicycling. They also conduct community service projects like one they were honored for recently, and also have many fun activities like parties, trips, and camps.

The club currently has eight 4-H members, boys and girls ranging from grades 4-10, from Greentown and several neighboring towns. However, any boy or girl, grade 4-13, from anywhere in Green County is welcome to join.

For more information about the Open House or the Greentown 4-H Club, call Mr. Chris Clover at 444-4444. For other 4-H Clubs in Green County, contact the 4-H Office of Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Green County, at 555-4141. Membership in 4-H is offered to all kids, grades 1-13 (one year out of high school), without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, disability or handicap.

*K. Diem, 5/92.*

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## SAMPLE #2

(Follow-up article)

4-H NEWS RELEASE

January 29, 1991

Contact: Chris Clover, Leader of Greentown 4-H Club

4 Clover Way, Greentown, NJ 44444 (555) 444-4444

### Greentown 4-H Club Members Cited for Environmental Work

The eight members of the Greentown 4-H Club received a special plaque from the Greentown Town Council last week for their efforts in cleaning up Greentown Park, three local roadsides, and the banks of the Green River during the past year.

The club members thought of the idea when they were planning their activities for the year back in September, said Chris Clover, volunteer club leader, of Clover Way. They wanted to do something to help the environment and the community, so these projects were perfect.

The club members worked with the club leader and parents to get the permission and equipment needed, and spent most of their weekends this fall doing the work.

Mary Jones, age 13, club president, accepted the award from Mayor Tom Smith on behalf of the entire club in a special ceremony held at the Town Hall. Jones lives on Maple Avenue. Other members of the club include Fred Schmidt age 11 of Oak Court; John Norton, age 10 of Main Street; Sue Lipfeld, age 13 of Clover City; Alex Baldwin, age 14 of Silverton; Mohammed Andrea, age 14 of Telltov Street; Mitzi Appleton, age 15 of Gurty Avenue; and Bill Ramos, age 16 of Clover Boulevard.

The club meets the first and third Tuesday of each month at 7:30 p.m. at Clover's home. The club's projects include woodworking, science, and bicycling. They also conduct community service projects like the one they were honored for recently, and also have many fun activities like parties, trips, and camps.

For more information about Greentown 4-H Club, call Mrs. Clover at 444-4444. For other 4-H Clubs in Green County, contact the 4-H Office of Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Green County, at 555-4141. Membership in 4-H is offered to all kids, grades 1-13 (one year out of high school), without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, disability or handicap.

*K. Diem, 1/91.*

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