



CCNH Press Release Guidelines

How to ensure your story is newsworthy

Before developing a news release, it is worth considering the things you like to read, watch, and listen to in the media. Most of us are interested in things we haven't heard before, find surprising, or help solve our problems. So before drafting your release, it's worth asking these questions:

- *Is there anything "new" in my story?*
- *Is there anything unusual or unexpected about it?*
- *What would make someone outside of my business care about this?*

Consider the structure and format of the release

To give yourself the best chance of achieving quality media coverage when drafting the release, consider the following recommendations:

The headline: In general, you want your headline to be around 10 words or less. Get to the heart of what the release is really about in the headline. Always prioritize what makes the story unique (e.g., statistics/angle, etc.)

Subheading and bullets: Use subheadings to add context to the title. Another option is to turn the subheading into a short, succinct summary—a press release in miniature. If the release contains a lot of complex information (e.g., financial results), it may require a clear headline followed by 2-3 bullet points, especially if there is a lot of data you want to communicate. In general, however, for press releases, a short headline followed by a longer subheading which explains the story in more detail would work fine.

The lead: Journalists go to great lengths in their stories to perfect the first sentence of their first paragraph – called the “lead.” The same rule applies to writing a news release – the first 20 to 30 words are crucial. In a typical news release, the “lead” should seek to answer as many as possible of the five *W*'s: who, when, what, where, and why. The hook should not be a sensational statement, but an interesting factual statement (e.g., “Program expansion offers support for youth with substance use disorders” or “Local schools to provide substance use treatment and support to students as an alternative to suspension in collaboration with Live Free Recovery”).

The text: Write the release in the form of an “inverted pyramid” with the main points at the top and incidental information below. Use short sentences and paragraphs, as well as simple language. Remember that a journalist may decide to cut and paste your release at any point, so even the “lead” should be able to stand on its own and still make sense. Make sure that the release is grammatically flawless. Even a single mistake can dissuade a reporter from taking you seriously. The ideal length of a press release is about **300 to 400 words**. That's just three or four short paragraphs and a couple of quotes. After the final paragraph, insert END or ###.

The quotes: Direct quotes from a named person involved in the story will help to humanize the story. Make sure the quotes are in everyday, conversational language and get straight to the point. Quotes should be used to provide **insight** and **opinion** – not information. If possible, a quote from a third-party stakeholder, such as a school collaborator, partnering organization, youth, or family, will help make the release look less self-serving and legitimize it to the journalist.

"I was 16 when I was involved in a drunk driving accident. Live Free guided me through the challenges of early recovery as a teenager. I am so grateful for the opportunities they have provided me."

Context: The release often needs to be set in context. Beware of leaving a reader asking, “**So what?**” You may need to spell out why a particular event is significant, i.e., because it is the first, last, worst, or best case of its kind, sets a precedent, or raises questions.

Length: One page is preferable — and two is the maximum.

Contact details: Include contact details for the approved spokesperson(s), if appropriate, and relevant media agency/contact.

Boiler Plates: No more than 80 words, the boiler plate should succinctly summarize what the business does (their products/ services), the markets they are in, revenue for the last financial year, etc. It should be kept up-to-date and avoid industry jargon. Only include verifiable facts and exclude opinions or commentary.

Live Free Recovery is a goal oriented and clinically-based peer recovery support program located in Newton, New Hampshire specializing in adolescent supports, and has been serving youth and families since 2015. For more information, visit www.livefreerecovery.com

Develop a compelling cover letter to gain attention

Before reading the release itself, the first thing that journalists will actually read is the email which accompanies it. This provides an opportunity to stand out and pique interest.

The subject line: The email subject line should be as engaging as it is accurate. It should state that it is a news release. It should encourage the journalist/reader to open the email and keep reading, while also not giving a false impression about the subject of the release. The subject

line can be the same as the headline of the release—most journalists will spend just a few seconds deciding whether something looks interesting.

Email copy: The pitch in the email body should be very similar to the first paragraph of the release. It should quickly explain the headline/email subject and highlight the main news point of the story clearly and vividly. However, unlike the release, there is also an opportunity to explain why the story is relevant for them – e.g., relates to a key story/or is a follow-up from a story that they have covered in the past. You can point out where it could sit in the publication. This can be tailored for key media targets.

Accompanying images: An image is worth a thousand words. An image that helps bring the story to life will improve the chances of the release being covered. The image should always be a high-res file and attached to the email. It should be accurately captioned either through the image file name or in the email body of text. Avoid sending big files that will clog up peoples' inboxes.

Formatting: The full release should be both copied within the email and attached as a pdf. This helps journalists on the move look at your email on their mobile phones.

Optimize your release for online platforms and share it on social media

When drafting the press release, it's important to consider Search Engine Optimization (SEO) to support your organization's domain prominence in search results and, therefore, brand visibility.

Consider the following during drafting stages:

- Draft a list of keywords and phrases around which you'd like to build brand association and visibility, and include these in the press release where possible. Pay particular attention to the headline, subheading, and first paragraph.
- Use hyperlinks where possible in the release and web copy to ensure linkbacks to your website, collaborators, or partners.
- Include links to social media channels in the additional information section of a press release.

When drafting social media posts to share news with our audiences, there are a couple of simple guidelines to consider:

- Try to keep language short, punchy, and to the point. Ensure that language is accessible to a broad audience base and doesn't include technical language/industry jargon that not everyone would understand.

- Always include a photo to help your post to stand out in feeds – ideally an image owned by your organization. Ensure that you have youth and guardian media consent releases on file if including any media of youth.
- Use [Bit.ly](https://bit.ly) to shorten web links in your post and ensure it looks neat.
- Include a call-to-action before your link to entice audiences, e.g., “Find out more” or “Read more here.”
- Always tag other entities in your post if they have social media profiles, to ensure that they’re alerted to your post.
- Research well-used hashtags that will help your post gain visibility and use between 2-3 maximum, i.e., #alternativepeergroup.
- When uploading images onto web pages, always add [alt-text](#) by right-clicking on the image. This strengthens your message and makes the website more accessible.