Libraries are not just quiet places to read. Programs, discussion groups, collaborative learning sessions, Internet access, book sales, story hours, video previewing, language learning, distance education, and a variety of other types of events and learning opportunities are held in libraries. One of the best ways to inform library patrons about available programs, events, and learning opportunities is to publicize the events in the local media—newspapers, radio, television, and websites.

**NEWS RELEASES**

**What Is a News Release?**

A news release is a short written statement that is sent to the media for publication. News releases are written to notify the public that something significant has just occurred or is about to occur.

News releases are often used to:

- Announce new programs or services at the library.
- Report on the progress and success of a program or service offered at the library.
- Provide new information about existing programs and services offered at the library.
- Announce special events, special services, seasonal programs, or meetings at the library.
- Inform the public about positions or policies adopted by the library.
- Communicate statements from the library on topics of interest to the community.
- Introduce new library staff to the community.
- Describe materials that have been added to the library’s collections.
Writing News Releases

All news releases must include information on:

- Whom the announcement is about
- What the announcement is about
- Where the event or service is taking place
- When the event or service is taking place
- Why the public may be interested in what is being announced

Who

- Who is presenting the program or service? Who was recently hired? Who has approved the policy? Who has written the new materials added to the library’s collection?

What

- Is the announcement about a meeting, a new program or service, new books, policy statements, or new hires?

When

- What is the exact time that an event or service will or did take place? For example: Thursday, January 11, at 10:00 a.m.; Monday mornings, 8:00 a.m. through noon.

Where

- What is the exact place that an event will or did take place? For example: Community room of the Clarion Free Public Library, 1234 Maple Street, Clarion, Pa.; Electronic Reference Room, Carlson Library, Clarion University of Pennsylvania, Clarion, Pa.

Why

- Why should people be interested in the announced event? For example: Anyone who has ever wanted to use a word processing program will want to attend this workshop on Microsoft Word 2000; If you want to learn to use library resources from your home, you will want to be at this workshop.

General Dos and Don’ts of News Releases

If there is more than one newspaper or there are duplicates of other types of news outlets (e.g., television, radio, community websites, cable television access) in the library’s service area, don’t send duplicate news releases to them. Do, however, try to “match” the library’s news with its customers.

Do check with local news editors to see how they like to have new releases delivered. Fax and e-mail have had a major impact on getting publicity to a news outlet. Follow up the fax or e-mail with a hard copy clearly marked “duplicate.”

Do clearly indicate why the library’s news release is timely and newsworthy.

Do identify the library fully.

Do identify if the announced event is free and open to the public.

Do cover all the facts. Assume that the readers have no background information on the subject of the news release.

Do refer to women and men in the same way. Use first names, middle initials, and last names for the first reference to a person. Subsequent references should use just the last name.
Do check every news release carefully to ensure that all the information is complete and accurate.

Do verify spellings of all names.

Don’t use initials, abbreviations, or acronyms to refer to your library or library programs.

Don’t use technical terms or library jargon. News release copy should be written at a junior high school reading level.

Don’t editorialize. If the news release must convey subjective ideas, use direct quotes. Quotes add life to news release copy and allow the library to mention the names of people.

Don’t use superlatives in describing the library, its services, or its programs.

What Does a News Release Look Like?

A news release must be structured so that the most important part comes first. The most important part of a news release is usually any information that relates to the purpose of the news release; e.g., “children’s story hour scheduled for next month,” or “you can return your overdue books without paying any overdue fines,” or “access over 12,000 peer-reviewed journals from your office or home computer.” After the first piece of information, details should be added in descending order of importance, with the least important information coming last. This is called an inverted pyramid style of writing.

The following are some general guidelines about the contents and format of a news release:

Send the news release on plain paper or on library letterhead. Whichever is used, clearly identify the library.

Write the name and address of the person to whom the news release is being sent in the upper left-hand corner of the release. If the name of the reporter is not known, name the editor and the department that should receive the release, e.g., Religion Editor, Daily Gazette; or Community Page Editor, Daily Gazette.

List the name of the person to be contacted if the reporter needs more information. The contact’s name, phone number, and e-mail address should go in the upper left corner of the release, directly under the name and address of the person to whom the release is being sent. A weekend phone number should be provided as a courtesy. Contact information for the general public will be included in the text of the release.

News releases should be typed, double spaced, on one side of the paper only. Drop down two lines and indicate when the information in the release may be printed. Use the phrase “For Immediate Release” if the newspaper may use the information when it is received. Use the phrase “For Release on [insert day and date]” if the information is not to be used until a specific date.

Drop down another two lines and begin the text of the release. Indent the first word of each paragraph 10 spaces rather than the usual four spaces (this provides “white space” and draws the editor’s eye toward the paragraph).
Keep releases short—editors prefer one-page releases. However, if the release runs onto another page, type the word “-More-” (centered) below the last line of type on the first page. Don’t end the first page in the middle of a paragraph, though. If the entire paragraph doesn’t fit on the page, insert a page break and start the paragraph at the beginning of the second page.

If the news release has two pages, type “-More-” at the bottom of the first page. Type the subject of the release and “Page 2” at the top left corner of the second page.

Indicate the end of the news release by using the symbols “###” or “-30-” or the word “END,” centered and typed two lines below the last line of copy.

Figure 2.1 graphically illustrates the tips provided above. Figure 2.2 provides a sample news release for a public library.

**FIGURE 2.1**

**News Release Tips**

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Our Town Public Library</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>125 Our Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Town, Our State, Our Zip</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Drop down two lines from the letterhead)

M. K. Smith, City Editor, Gazette
123 Elm Street
Anytown, Ohio 44220

(Drop down two lines)

**Contact:** Lucy Librarian
Phone (000) 196-4739: Fax (000) 196-4638
E-mail: lucy@library.com

(Drop down two lines and type:)

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

(Drop down two more lines to type your headline—centered)

**Our Town Library Celebrates 100 Years of Service**

(Drop down two lines from your headline and begin your copy. Double space between each line.)

Indent your paragraph ten spaces. It helps to draw the editor’s eye to the paragraph and makes each paragraph stand out.

Your first paragraph (called the lead) should begin with the “news,” e.g., the kickoff event for the centennial celebration.

Subsequent paragraphs will provide information about the other special events (such as a book signing, storytelling, etc.), why townspeople should attend the events, the days and times of the events, and so on.

If there is an individual on the library staff whom the public should contact regarding the events, their name should be included in the copy. (Your contact person listed at the top of the release is primarily for the media to contact, should they have further questions.)

If your release is longer than one page, include the word “-More-” centered after the last sentence.

-More-

(Use a slugline to identify the story continuing on page 2:)

**LIBRARY CELEBRATES 100 YEARS 222222**

Continue with your information on page 2, if necessary. At the end of your release, type the word “END” or use the symbol “-30-” or “###” to signal the end of the information. Whichever end style you choose, it should be centered after the last sentence.

END
FIGURE 2.2
Sample News Release for a Public Library

Typed on library letterhead

Contact: Mary Jones
Phone (123) 456-7890: Fax (123) 456-7891
E-mail: mary.jones@wonderful.lib.oh.us
Wonderful Public Library

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Art-in-Action at Library

Leave your winter blahs outside and experience inspiring works of art inside the Wonderful Public Library at the 4th annual Art-in-Action on Saturday, February 26, from 9:00 am until 1:00 pm.

Celebrate the unique talents of more than 20 gifted local artists as they display and demonstrate their work. The public will be allowed to test their own creativity with hands-on activities at each art station. Browse through the library and learn how to paint beautiful sunsets, draw terrifying dinosaurs, create wonderful music, design dazzling jewelry and more as you release the Van Gogh hidden inside you.

According to organizer and library staff member Theresa Exlibris, “Art-in-Action has been an unqualified success in the past. Hundreds of people have attended our Art-in-Action programs. Artists will be scattered throughout the library exhibiting and demonstrating their art techniques for all to enjoy.”

There will be something fun for everyone in the family. Bring all the artistic (and artistically challenged) members of your family and enjoy a morning of inspiration and art appreciation at the Wonderful Public Library. Art-in-Action is free and open to the public. For more information, please call (330) 722-2790.

###

PHOTO RELEASES

When important news events occur, newspapers often send a staff photographer to cover them. Newspapers are especially interested in acquiring unusual picture ideas to illustrate stories. Here are some suggestions regarding photo releases:

If a press photographer is unable to come to the library to cover an event, offer to send people to the newspaper office for a staged “photo opportunity.” Establish a rapport with the photographers or photo editors of the local newspapers in order to develop a routine where a photographer is often
sent to cover the events that the librarians identify as newsworthy. After establishing contact with the photo editor, fax or e-mail dates and times of photo opportunities in the library. Public library children’s programs and academic library programs that link a local community with the academic institution provide wonderful photo opportunities.

If a photographer is sent to cover a library event, make suggestions regarding pictures that are creative, rather than pictures that are routine. For example, many newspapers will not photograph presentations of checks, handshaking, or signings of proclamations. However, they might photograph children using a new reading room funded by one person’s generosity, or the line of people waiting to get into the library after the passing of a local referendum that allowed the public library to remain open on Sunday. They might also photograph the dedication of an exhibit in an academic library that is open to the general public, or visits to the college library by local high schoolers for library instructional programs or workshops.

Before the photographer arrives, be sure that all the people and props are ready.

Provide the photographer with a “cut line” (caption) for the picture. The cut line should identify all of the people in the picture (from left to right as one faces the group). Verify that all names are spelled correctly. Cut lines are typed and provide a brief description of the event or activity. They may be taped to the bottom of the photo so that they fold flat against the back of the photo.

If a press photographer cannot cover the library event, and the people involved cannot get to the newspaper office, a library staff member can take the black-and-white photo. However, be sure to include a cut line with the photo. Do not write directly on the photo back with a pen. Use a felt-tip pen to identify the picture if it is necessary to write on the photo. Be aware that most newspaper policies state that photos will not be returned.

**PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS (PSAs)**

**What Are PSAs?**

PSAs are short messages about nonprofit organizations that are broadcast over the radio, television, or computer networks at no charge. Although PSAs are usually used to motivate people to do something, they cannot be commercial in nature. For example, a PSA might solicit volunteers for a special program, or it might be aimed at getting patrons to use the library’s new “virtual” information reference service. However, it cannot be directed at advertising a for-profit business, nor can it include the names of any corporate sponsors for a library’s program.

PSAs can be broadcast over the radio, television, Internet, or computer networks.

If radio is used, PSAs are either read live by the station announcer or they can be prerecorded.
If television is used, librarians should explore which cable channels are available for local access by nonprofit groups. This access will vary from town to town and from state to state. The type of access that a library might receive could range from minimal broadcast time to free-of-charge use of studios and equipment. Occasionally, cable companies will also contribute their own staff to help with the production of a PSA. And morning news programs will frequently broadcast PSAs.

For television PSAs, some stations still require 3/4" videotapes, while others use VHS, S-VHS, or a digital format. It is a good idea to call the local television station to determine which format should be used.

If the Internet or other local or regional websites are used, electronic bulletin boards and news services should be chosen to target appropriate audiences.

Creating PSAs

The most important thing to remember while writing a PSA for radio is that radio PSAs are written for people’s ears, not their eyes. The broadcast audience cannot reread a sentence if it is not clear, and if parts of the PSA are boring, the audience cannot skim over the boring parts in order to get to the important parts. If the message is boring, broadcast audiences will “tune out” and disregard it. The following are some general suggestions for writing a PSA:

Write as you would speak.

Keep the sentence structure simple. For example, this is a poor sentence for a PSA: “The library’s literacy series, sponsored by the Laubach Literacy Council, and focused on the needs of adults who have trouble reading, encourages all interested adults to apply.” This is better: “Adults with reading difficulties are encouraged to sign up for literacy classes sponsored by the Laubach Literacy Council.” Or “If you are an adult who has difficulty reading the daily paper or stories to your children, sign up for the literacy classes beginning in __________. The classes are free. They are sponsored by the Laubach Literacy Council and your local library.”

Attribute direct quotes at the beginning of a sentence. For example, “Dean Johnson says, ‘The library is the heart of the university.’”

Provide a pronunciation key for any words or names in a PSA that might be difficult to pronounce. For example, “Trustee Earl Guogin (pronounced Jo-jin) called. . .”

Make PSA copy as clear and concise as possible so that the broadcast station does not have to edit it. This will avoid any editing changes that inadvertently change the meaning of a PSA.

If there is a time limit for a PSA (e.g., 30 seconds), make sure that the copy does not go over the time limit when it is read. In determining how much to put into the PSA, remember that less is better than too much. If a PSA has too much content, the broadcast audience will be confused. One way to say less but still allow a lot of information to be pre-
presented is to end the PSA with a telephone number, e-mail address, or physical address for more information.

PSAs should run 10, 20, 30, or 60 seconds. The shorter ones generally have more chance of being used, so it is important to know in advance what a station’s policies and formats allow. A good rule of thumb is to allow about two and a half regular-length words to each second. So:

- 25 words will take 10 seconds to say
- 50 words will take 20 seconds to say
- 75 words will take 30 seconds to say
- 150 words will take 60 seconds to say

If some of the words are longer, writers will need to allow a little more time. Also, each digit of a telephone number should be counted as a separate word.

- Test the length of a PSA by timing it as it is read out loud.

**Typing and Submitting PSAs**

A PSA should be prepared in the most appealing manner possible. Things to consider include:

Radio copy is typed triple spaced, in ALL CAPS or in all lowercase. Type one announcement per page.

Identify the library at the top of the page.

List the name of the person to be contacted if the reporter needs more information. The contact’s name, phone number, and e-mail address should go in the upper left corner of the release, directly under the name and address of the library. A weekend phone number should be provided as a courtesy. Contact information for the general public will be included in the text of the release.

Identify the PSA as a Public Service Announcement.

Identify the reading time (i.e., “:30” for a 30-second spot). Some radio stations also prefer to have a word count total included after the reading time.

The words “Use until” indicate the date upon which the announcement should stop being broadcast.

Although the sender determines the date range for the broadcasting of the PSA, the sender will not be able to dictate the times that the PSA will air. If it is accepted, the PSA will be put into rotation along with other announcements.

Separate phrases in radio copy with three dots (….) according to what can be comfortably read with one breath. The breaks allow the broadcaster to read the announcement smoothly.

Include a phonetic pronunciation in the copy if there is a difficult name or term to pronounce. For example: “Ms. Skievendella (Skiv-in-del-a) Boondoggle (Boon-dog-gle) will read….”
EVALUATION OF NEWS RELEASES, PHOTO RELEASES, AND PSAs

Keep copies of the published releases and photos. Determine which papers most consistently publish library information and photographs.

One way to evaluate a library’s success with this method of publicity is to count the number of news releases and photographs published in the newspaper and to keep count of the number of PSAs broadcast. However, do not judge success based only on this data, because too often a “soft news story” will be bumped by a local paper for a world or local event. College papers will often bump library stories for more controversial issues that have recently become known about campus. Newspapers can only print in the space they have available. If no news releases have been published, ask for an interview with the appropriate editor to discuss how publicity about library events could be included in the local news section. Finally, it is sometimes helpful to keep track informally by asking patrons where they heard about a specific program or service.

OTHER MEDIA OPPORTUNITIES

Libraries that have local access television in their area have a wonderful opportunity to promote library programs, activities, and services using these media. The sophis-
tication and structure of local access television channels vary greatly, so it is important to investigate thoroughly the types of access that might be available. In spite of the work, however, the benefits of using this medium are well worth the effort.

Local access television is most often provided to schools, government agencies, or all residents of a geographic region (called “complete public access”). Librarians can easily develop tie-ins with local access television, and especially with channels that are focused on education. For example, a summer reading program might be promoted as a method of maintaining reading skills, or a story hour for preschoolers might be broadcast in its entirety. Academic librarians might sponsor talk shows highlighting research skills and the library’s electronic databases, or they might use the local access television channel to promote workshops and library hours. Library directors/deans, department heads, reference librarians who excel at reader’s advisory or library instruction, and library trustees can be interesting “guests” for local government talk show programs. All of these library representatives can inform audiences about programs, services, and activities at the library.

PSAs can be used effectively if the library is using the local access channel for promotional purposes. However, for video clips or live broadcasts, more talent and much more planning will be necessary. For example, story times are frequently mentioned as something that “should be on television.” Television story times are possible, but librarians must make sure that they have received copyright clearance for broadcasting the story, showing the illustrations in the book, and for any commercially produced music that is used during the broadcast. Since copyright clearances take a great deal of time to obtain, preparation for these types of activities must begin far in advance of the actual broadcast.

Fortunately, though, librarians don’t need to know how to edit, create audio tracks, or shoot video in order to broadcast on television. Usually, the broadcast station will provide this type of assistance as well as the necessary equipment. And if the local university or college has a communications department or an instructional technologies unit, college students and faculty can be employed to help develop videos that the library can use. Although in-house video production skills are not necessary, librarians will need to rely heavily on the skills of the local television producer. Therefore, it is very important to know what the local television producer will provide in order to ensure that all aspects of the library’s planned production are covered.

SOURCES OF ADDITIONAL INFORMATION


