

Your news is the news we want.

We've compiled these guidelines to help you communicate with our newsroom more effectively—because your news is the news we want.

Ask yourself — is it news?

Stick to the facts when preparing a news release. You may want to consider these questions: What's the news? Who's involved? Where's it happening? Why's it happening? And when? Leave out statements that are merely promotional. If the news is negative, it's best to be upfront with the information to avoid damaging your credibility.

Emphasize the benefits and significance of the news.

It always helps to know what types of information are of interest to editors. Ask yourself: Is your news item unusual? Does it reflect an interesting or important change? Is it part of a larger trend? Does it have any significance? To whom? Does it have a connection to history? Does it have name recognition? Is it a first-time event?

Keep it simple.

With all of the information we sort through on a daily basis, we welcome brevity and conciseness. Stick to your point, keep the news release simple and leave out superfluous information. No need to draw any conclusions or play up any aspects of the news item with superlatives. Put another way: we prefer a plain, unfrosted sheetcake to a three-tiered, decorated and frosted triple chocolate mousse cake!

Accuracy is essential.

Always double-check the facts contained in your news release before submission. Remove anything that doesn't check out. Remove any statements that editorialize or that could be considered exaggerations. Stick to the facts.

Always do your homework.

Submitting your resume to the wrong person can really slow down the job application process. Same goes for your news release. Submitting it to the wrong person or wrong department at the newspaper means we'll likely not be able to act on your news, particularly if the information is time-sensitive. So please do yourself and your organization a favor: always identify the correct person to receive the news release before you submit it. Contact information for each section editor is on the front page of each section. Inquire about deadlines, addresses, and

any requirements in advance. If contacting the newspaper by phone, be fully prepared to answer any questions put to you by newspaper staff by having your facts ready and at hand. You may find it useful to keep a talking points list with you if speaking with newspaper staff over the phone—the busy news staff member will appreciate your preparation.

Use the correct format.

Please date your news release, so that editors will be aware of the timeliness or urgency of the information. Double space your submission, so editors can mark for changes. Keep releases to a maximum of two pages.

Make sure your contacts are informed and helpful.

The name at the top of the release should be the contact person, who should be fully informed about every aspect of the program or service. He or she should be willing to drop everything to get the editors what they need for the article. Make sure that whoever is named in the release has a file of information at his or her fingertips and is authorized to answer questions.

Customize the release to target different markets.

Emphasize the local connection at the beginning of the news release. It usually takes only a rewrite of the lead paragraph to make the difference.

Provide a minimum of two weeks notice.

On significant events and programs, send a release a month before the event and follow it up with another release two weeks before. If you could not have predicted the event, try to give 24 hours notice or as much as possible.

Follow up with a phone call.

Call to make sure the release has been received. If not, ask if another should be sent. Ask if anything else is needed. Become a key source of information on your industry, not just your own group, and alert editors to significant events.

Richmond Times-Dispatch
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Contacting

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