

Media: Introduction

Why use the media?

There are lots of reasons why the media is a really useful tool when campaigning. You can use it to:

- **Raise Awareness** about your campaign;
- **Put pressure** on the people with the power to create the change you want see;
- **Attract** more people to the campaign;
- **Improve the image** of the campaign.

Use the media as a tool to raise your profile and get your message across - a little bit of work on your part can get a story read by thousands of people. It's easy

Getting your story reported

The next page looks at what you need to know and do in order to get your story into the media. This includes:

- Which media to contact;
- Background work;
- Finding the right angle;
- Press stunts and 'hooks'.

The most obvious targets for your attention are **campus based media** but don't be put off approaching other local media outlets, or even the nationals, if you think your event or action warrants it.

Press releases

The press release is the standard format you should use to get your story in the media. Send one out well in advance of the action, another just before, and one more afterwards. Go to the press release pages to find out what to include and how they should look, including a sample press release for the Ditch Dirty Development campaign.


Other media techniques

This page looks at a few other ways of getting your story in the media...

- Interviews and phone-ins;
- Letters to the editor;
- Free "what's on" guides.

Training

Practicing these skills will improve your groups' ability to make an impact in the media.

- **Book a media workshop** to practice and gain the confidence to use all these skills.
- **If you are interested in being a media or press officer for your group contact us**  and find out about the extra training and support we can offer you.

Top Tips

- Make your actions creative and media-friendly;
- Practice writing press releases;
- Integrate media and publicity work into all your actions.



King Edward VI School P&P group got their fantastic human vending machine publicised in a local newspaper.
Image © Paul Collins Southern Daily Echo

Press release template

Download a press release template as a guide to writing your own.

Media: Getting your story reported

How can you get your story reported? If you know how the media works, with a bit of practice you can be front page news!

Which media should you use?

Try as many of these as you feel up to but think about the audience you want to target and where you've seen similar stories before.

- **Campus paper, newsletter and radio:** probably the easiest and most useful for your group. The best way is to get to know someone in the editorial or news team, but if not you can just send them a press release. They're usually short of news, and if you get them on side they can become key campaign allies.
- **Local papers and radio:** They love stories about young people doing interesting things, and especially photo opportunities, so it's worth press releasing them.
- **Alternative media:** You can get your stories out to activist networks through all kinds of alternative publications. Two examples are the Indymedia, a website to which you can add your own news, and Schnews, a weekly activists newsletter in paper and email form.
- **Press associations:** The press association distribute news to media around the country, so if you can get them to include your story, you have instant access to a huge range of media. To do that, you simply send them a news release by email to copy@pa.press.net.
- **National media:** If you think your story's good enough, why not release it to the national media? You can send your press release by email or fax. They hold stories on file, so even if you don't make it in first time, they may look you up sometime in the future.

Don't forget the **P&P network**: Let other groups know about what you've been doing and any successful actions or campaigns you've run by **uploading your stories and pictures onto the P&P website** at peopleandplanet.org/news/contribute/

Top Tips

- Know how the media works and play to it;
- Find a local angle to every story;
- Make your stunts exciting, but with a clear and rational aim!



The P&P group at UCLan secured a double page spread in their student paper.

Joe Bardwell, student member of the Management Committee and former UCLan group organiser, says:

“Student media is an amazing resource: it has the ability to reach your target audience, the students, like no other outlet. It's not really a challenge to get something in the paper, particularly a student paper, they are looking for stories about students. People & Planet at most unis will be one of the most exciting things happening. Press release your events to local and student media - it's free publicity!

Background work

You will need to do a little research and get together the following information for your target media:

- **Editorial/news e-mail address** (e-mail is the preferred method of receiving news for most media outlets now).
- **Editorial/news phone & fax number.**
- **Deadline** - find out when they need stories by, as there's no point sending them news if it's too late for them to use it!
- **Name of the environment/politics/education/development correspondents.** In the case of small local, or student outfits, these will probably be the news team. It's also worth getting the details of the features editor so that you can try and get them to include a larger piece at some stage.

Now **give them a call** and introduce yourself. Explain a little about your group, what you do and why. **Tell them you're available for comment** (assuming you are) on the issues you work on, and say you will send them press releases whenever your group does interesting things. You might want to **offer to write articles on eco/social issues**, or help them put together a feature.

Getting the story out

Now you've done the background work, it's time to get the story out there. You'll usually do this through a **press release**, an **interview**, a **letter to the editor**, or some combination of the three. To get news attention your story must be a current issue, or a current development of a long running issue. **If you're going for local coverage, it must also have a local angle.**

Finding the right angle

To get coverage of a story it is important to **present it attractively to the journalist**. For local news this angle must have some obvious local significance or relevance. Any story that requires complex reader knowledge of financial, economic or political matters will have difficulty in gaining coverage.

Examples of good local-angle 'headlines' connected to international issues are:

- Students lobby local MP on AIDS.
- Local MP endorses students' Ditch Dirty Development campaign.
- Local P&P group raises over £1000 in aid of Fairtrade campaign.
- Local factory involved in production of chemical weapons.

When writing these stories, the journalist will have to include some background information on the issue for the reader. As a result the **general public learns about the issue directly through news stories**. The amount of coverage a pressure group obtains will largely be determined by the **quantity and quality of the stories** it provides for the media.

The quality, as viewed by the journalist, is related to two things:

- **Up-to-date:** in most frequent publications news stories are about current events, not situations. The existence of a given situation - poverty, the unfairness of the international trade system - does not count as news. However, changes in a given situation or the revelation of new facts about a situation are often considered as news.
- **Reader interest:** for the commercial media the overwhelming priority is news that sell papers or attract viewers. Unfortunately, this does not always mean news of true importance.

Campaigners talk about **finding a 'hook'** - something to make a situation newsworthy and interesting. Good 'hooks' include: * events * anniversaries * national days * milestones * statistics * reports

Finding the right hook will be the most important part of your media strategy.

Press stunts

When planning an event, keep the needs of the media in mind. They look for events that are:

- **Imaginative:** try to brainstorm creative and original ideas with your group. One of the reasons for the drop in the coverage of marches and rallies is that the media have become bored with them. Your events should therefore aim to capture the attention of the media by being a bit different.
- **Visual:** by providing a great photo opportunity, your message will gain coverage by accompanying the image.
- **Relevant:** try to come up with some clear link between the event and the issue.

The range of newsworthy events is very broad, from meetings to demonstrations. Events are sometimes held with the sole intention of gaining coverage. Greenpeace, for example, favour draping large banners from conspicuous structures. Editors are increasingly reluctant to cooperate with these publicity stunts if they feel they are being 'used' and it is often better to hold a real event for the media to cover.

Media: Press Releases

The press release is the standard format you must use to get your story in the media, and the best way of getting all the information across. Using them with the student media will make you stand out.

Top Tips

- Make sure you use this format;
- Send one out well in advance of the action, another just before, and one more afterwards.

Writing your news release

Content

Before you start writing your press release think about:

- What is **the story**. Why should the media cover this? What is your **local or human angle** or **hook**?
- **Your message**. What are the key points that you want to get across about your campaign?
- **Who are your audience?** What language should you use to make it appeal to them?
- How can you make it as **concise and clear** as possible?

Format

To be effective, a press release needs a certain format. It must fit on one side of A4, be in a legible size and font and contain the following things:

- On headed paper, **make sure it says 'Press Release' at the top**;
- **Give contact details**: the name of the person dealing with the media and a mobile number that will be switched on;
- **Date it and give it a snappy title**. Make sure the title makes it clear what the story is - don't make it too obscure and avoid puns;
- If you want photographers or camera crews to attend, **mark it 'Photo Opportunity - Crews welcome'**;
- **Make it clear when the story is for**, usually: *'For immediate release'*. If you need to keep the story secret until a certain date be wary of sending a press release in advance - the media won't always hold a story if you've *'embargoed'* it;
- **Use the first paragraph to outline the whole story in brief**. This should explain the headline and the *who, what, when, where, how and why*. Expand in the second (and maybe a third) paragraph, with extra layers of information in decreasing order of importance. The body of the press release should be structured just like a news story, so that it can be cut from the bottom always leaving the main story intact;
- **Stick in a quote from a group spokesperson**. The print press will often use this in their story, so make it count. Try to keep it short and punchy;
- If you have a **photo**, **put it in a separate box** in the press release and explain what it is of;
- **Mark the Release 'ENDS'** so they know it's over (sounds obvious, but do it anyway!);
- **Repeat the contact details**;
- Finally, add **'Notes for the editor'**. This is where you can stick in all those crucial statistics and references to United Nations reports etc. This can be on a separate sheet, but don't add too much.

Check it and double check it for obvious mistakes. Does it get your key messages across concisely?

Sending it Out

1. **Email** or fax your press release (using the details you collected in your background research), a week in advance of your event or action. Personalise the email header.
2. **Phone up** after sending the press release. Say something like *'I'm just calling to talk about the story...'* Ask if they're clear on the detail, and whether they want to ask any questions. This is an excuse to tell them how fantastic your story is. If they haven't received your press release ask if you can send it again.
3. If the press don't turn-up to your action, **take some photos and press release it again afterwards**. Put it in the independent press, up on your website and send it to the P&P office.
4. If the press do pick the story up, you could also end up being **invited to give an interview**. There is more advice on this on our interview pages.

Media: Sample Press Release

Press releases are usually sent in a format which gets the message across best. Download our [template](#) , and have a look below to see how this might look in practice.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Local students build pipeline to end aid for oil outrage

Photo opportunity 11am, Wednesday 10 October, University Square

Contact: Name of someone who will be available to talk about the campaign and action. 07890 123456

University of Ourtown People & Planet group will be building a giant oil pipeline across University Square at 11am on Wednesday 10 October. They are protesting against spending UK development aid on climate changing fossil fuel extraction projects, and are demanding support for low carbon, renewable energy. The pipeline will be signed by members of the public, and delivered to the UK's Department for International Development.

UK development aid is currently spent on fossil fuel extraction projects, such as the Chad-Cameroon oil pipeline, by international agencies like the World Bank. These projects contribute to climate change, and often have a harmful effect on the local environment and on human rights in the area. Climate change will be hugely damaging to people all over the world, especially those in developing countries.

People & Planet spokesperson, Insert name here, said: *"It is disgraceful that while the UK Government claims to be acting to tackle climate change, they continue to fund projects which will result in massive carbon emissions in the future. We are asking the Department for International Development to prioritise renewable energy instead."*

People & Planet co-ordinator, Insert name here, said: *"The Department for International Development exists to alleviate poverty. Climate change will hit the poorest first and hardest — that's why we are demanding an end to funding which contributes to climate change. It's a contradiction for the UK to spend money earmarked for poverty reduction on fossil fuels."*

Contact: Insert name here 07890 123456

ENDS

Notes for editors

1. Ditch Dirty Development is a campaign of the national student organisation, People & Planet. For more information see: peopleandplanet.org/ditchdirtydevelopment, phone 01865 245678 or email climate@peopleandplanet.org
2. The campaign focuses on the role of the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) and is calling on DFID to produce an energy and climate change strategy which commits them to ensuring their activities actively contribute to global emissions reductions and increase access to energy services in the developing world. People & Planet believes that to do this DFID must end all support (bilateral and multilateral) for fossil fuel extraction, and massively increase support for renewable energy.
3. Climate change is predicted to affect people in developing countries most severely. Christian Aid reports that 185 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa could die of disease directly attributable to climate change by the end of the century. Drought and famine, caused by unpredictable rainfall, are already affecting 11 million people in east Africa. www.christianaid.org.uk/climatechange
4. People & Planet are also campaigning to transform the environmental performance of the UK's universities, and are part of the national I Count campaign for both personal and political action on climate change. peopleandplanet.org/climatechange

Media: Other techniques

Here we look at a few other ways of getting your story in the media: letters to the editor; what's on guides; and interviews.

Letters to the Editor

- **Editors like controversial discussion going on in their letters column.** If you feel they did you or an issue an injustice in an article, take the opportunity to write in and say so.
- **Keep it calm and intelligent** - retain the moral high ground by not descending into petty politicking. You just want to seem nice and reasonable.
- **Remember to keep to your core message**, even if they've made countless stupid points you feel desperate to rectify.
- **Always keep the readership of the newspaper in mind** - if you are writing to a local paper then global issues must have a local link.
- **Concise, amusing letters that are under 80 words long stand a very good chance of publication.** Don't try and cover too much ground in a short letter. It is better just to make one or two points clearly and emphatically, the editor might choose to cut out your most important point otherwise.
- **Look at the letters page of the publication to find out what the usual style and length is.** There is no single correct style for writing letters; it all depends on the newspaper, the subject and your objectives.
- **Always include your name and address** - some papers won't print letters without them. You can ask for your details to be withheld if you like.

What's On

Don't forget the free 'What's On' guide in many papers and on local radio for promoting your events. As a minimum you need to give them the **Date, Time, Venue, Price, What's happening** and **Something that sounds fun**

Interviews

Always remember that you're in control. You don't have to give this interview, they've asked for it because they want the news.

- Think through what you want to say. **Find the 3 most important bits of information** and try to have a fact or two to back them up. Try rehearsing beforehand how to get these 3 points across clearly and succinctly. If they ask you other questions that aren't relevant or are an attempt to divert you - say *'I'm not here to talk about that - I'm here to tell your listeners..'*
- Remember it's not just what you say but **how you say it**. You need to sound suitably passionate, intelligent and knowledgeable. Don't swear, don't shout and don't rant. **Short firm sentences will get you a long way!**
- If you're worried about the interview, **ask to see the questions in advance.**
- **In a recorded interview, you can ask to give your answer again to make it clearer.**
- If you're on the radio or TV, get someone to tape you and then sit down and honestly appraise it, but don't give yourself too hard a time. Would Joe Public who knows nothing about the subject have understood.
- You're perfectly entitled to **refuse to give interviews to journalists who are likely to twist what you're saying against you.**

Top Tip

- Remember less is more - try to keep what you say to 3 points.



Strathclyde University P&P group had their Fairtrade Fashion Show publicised in Scotland's largest 'What's On' guide and a national newspaper after sending in this photo and a press release.

New media

With the advent of the information superhighway there are absolutely loads of opportunities for you to create your own media coverage and promote yourself through networks and websites. Here are just a few options for you to explore:

Indymedia

The content of the Indymedia UK website is created through a system of open publishing: anyone can upload a written, audio and video report or a picture directly to the site through an openly accessible web interface. Through this system of 'Direct Media', Indymedia erodes the dividing line between reporters and reported, between active producers and passive audience: people are enabled to speak for themselves. At bigger actions, Indymedia UK volunteers extend this participatory model by establishing 'Public Access Terminals' on the streets, and facilitating direct access to the technical equipment that enables participants to upload to the website.

Facebook

Some may see it as a demon of our age but it's difficult to deny the power of "the book". You can establish a group and promote the events you're organising to everyone in the group. It can be a great way to share photos of events and build a camaraderie amongst members. Finally, you can use it to promote e-actions and as a way for members to communicate with each other. Be warned though, people may not check their facebook accounts for ages and may say their going to attend an event on facebook but not do so in reality.

Group Websites

If you've got a computer whizz kid in your group then you might want to ask them to manage your public profile via the medium of a website. You can promote upcoming events, provide details of where and when the group meets, provide information the campaigns you work on, and celebrate your past successes. In short, they can act as a big interactive promotional tool. Also, in terms of media stories, you have complete editorial control and can include exciting features such as video (see YouTube below). Some good examples of group websites include:

- [Brunel University Green Society](#)
- [Durham University P&P](#)
- [Edinburgh University P&P](#)

YouTube

Someone in your group is likely to have a camera good enough to record short films on and YouTube allows you to post them up on the interweb for all the world (with access to an internet connection) to see. Here are some particularly inspiring ideas:

- [Leeds University P&P take an oil pipeline to their local NatWest](#)
- [Royal Holloway P&P promote recycling on campus](#)
- [York University Vikings at Faslane](#)

The P&P Website

Don't forget to tell us what you do so that we can write about it on this very website (photos are a bonus too)!