



### Overview

- What is free publicity?
- Building your media lists/contacts
- Types of media
- What is news?
- Messaging
- Planning
- Writing a news release
- Pitching a story without a release
- Tip Sheets
- Commenting on National News

### What is Free Publicity?

- Newspaper articles
- Editorials/Op-Eds
- Newsletter articles
- Magazine articles
- TV/Radio
- Public Service Announcements
- Social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter)
- Basically anything you don't pay for!

### Controlled vs. Non-controlled

- Controlled:
  - Facebook, Twitter
  - Editorials/Op-Eds
  - Public Service Announcements
  - Website
  - Newsletter articles
- Non-controlled (but you often have input):
  - Newspaper articles (mentions may result with no effort on your part – and some may not be good)
  - Magazine articles
  - TV/Radio

### Benefits of Non-controlled

- Someone else does much of the work.
- More credibility because it's not self-promotion (even though it results from self-promotion).
- Not preaching to the choir as much as with own communication vehicles.

### Identify Your Target Media Outlets

- Build a media contact list:
  - List all of the newspapers (dailies and community papers), TV and radio stations, partner newsletters and magazines that cover the area you work in.
- Call or email each media outlet to find out how, to whom and where they would like news releases sent (e.g. email or fax?):
  - Today, emails are the norm but some smaller outlets may prefer fax. Find out what they want so you have the best chance of having your release read!
- As a note, many reporters these days are very busy and prefer pitches via email. They often have so many calls and voicemails and no time to call people back, but if your pitch is in an email, they can read it and go back to it later or quickly pass it on to someone else.

## Newspapers

- Good way to reach a large number of people – about half the population reads a newspaper of some sort – daily or community.
- Biggest audience: 65+, educated (least impact: ages 18-34).
- Cover a wide variety of topics.
- Better chance of getting your message communicated than broadcast.
- Great for timely news.
- Identify the reporter who covers your area of interest or to the editor.

## Magazines

- Monthly (Reader's Digest), bi-monthly (Our Canada), quarterly (Green Living, In The Hills, On The Bay, Watershed), weekly (Macleans).
- Audience: women > men, 18-64.
- Not for timely news.
- Narrower topic range.
- Longer, more indepth stories.
- Better chance for more input and accompanying photographs.

## Magazines (con't)

- Become familiar with the type and length of stories they run.
- Make sure you aren't pitching something they recently covered (do your research).
- Magazines have a long publication timeline - if you are pitching anything seasonal, be sure to pitch well in advance.
- Editors will not usually let you write an article on behalf of your own organization, but you can pitch the editor who may assign a writer, or pitch to a freelance writer directly - especially one who has written for your target outlet.
- Review submission guidelines (often available online) before pitching.

## Radio

- Radios are everywhere - most pervasive media out there!
- Audience: men > women, 25-64, youth tuning in.
- Wealthier people listen more often – great fund raising tool.
- Many opportunities: news, talk shows, public service announcements.
- Always include access to interviews with an expert on your subject.
- Radio news is so short - keep comments short, sharp and insightful.
- Conversational – talk like you are chatting with a friend –there is no visual so a monotone voice or dull comments will lose listener interest.
- Each organization will have some people who are better at speaking on air – find those people and use them for radio.
- Contact the producers of specific shows you want to pitch bigger stories to, and the newsroom or commuter announcers for news info.

## Television

- Audience: biggest age group is 65+.
- Morning talk shows, noon-hour shows and news.
- Contact the producers of specific shows you want to pitch bigger stories to, and the assignment editors in the newsroom for news info.
- Local news often has a “good news” feature.
- TV is *visual* - so your story should have a visual element and your on-air spokesperson should be charismatic and animated.

## Other Outlets

- E-zines/E-newsletters: Send pre-written content to editors (content may be from your own website, e-newsletter, or other sources).
- Web-based Publications: The Green Pages posts environmentally related news – send them your news releases and any other timely green stories ([www.thegreenpages.ca](http://www.thegreenpages.ca)).
- Print newsletters or partner publications.

## What is News?

- Not everything we do is news, but with the right angle, it can be.
- Learn to think like the media.
- "What's in it for me?"
- Would a range of people find it interesting?
- What kind of news/stories do your target media outlets run?
  - e.g. Earth Day – Earth Day in itself isn't news and sending a release to say that it's Earth Day and you're doing conservation work in general is not news. But, if you are having a conservation event for Earth Day or you are doing some key management work in recognition of Earth Day (e.g. tree planting) that is news.

## Developing Your Messages

- What are your messages?
- These will differ based on your goal, but it is also a good idea to develop some standard messages about your organization and its work.
- Messages should be clear, simple, direct and emotional.
- Don't get bogged down in layers – get to the heart of the message.
- Use facts and stats to create a case, not anecdotes or opinions.
- What step do you want the audience to take? How can you get them there? What is the relevance for/to them?

## Developing Your Messages (con't)

- Bad news is more media worthy than good - wrap your good news in something bad/emotive:
  - e.g. A recent study by U.S. conservation groups has revealed that grassland birds are the fastest declining bird group in North America. Habitat degradation has been identified as the main cause for this decline. We have an opportunity to protect critical grassland bird habitat – *but we need your support.*
- Repeat your messages, especially with TV and Radio:
  - Your five-minute interview may get cut to a five-second clip. Make sure you are on target! In media releases, repeat your key message in a quote from someone in your organization.

## Planning Your Publicity Efforts

- Audience
- Goals
- Objectives
- Tactics
- Budget
- Timeline

## Audience

- Who is your audience?
  - Current supporters
  - General public
  - Stakeholders
  - Employees
  - Board
  - Volunteers
- What do they read?
- Where do they get their news/info from?
- Where will you catch them?

## Goals

- What is the goal of your effort?
  - Fundraising
  - Organization Awareness
  - Education
  - Event Promotion
- Identifying your goal will help you set objectives.

### Objectives

- What is the objective of your effort? What objectives will help meet your goal?
  - Get X media hits by [date]
  - Get \$\$ dollars by [date]
  - Get XX species reports by [date]
  - Get XX calls/emails by [date]
  - Get XX Event RSVPs for event
- Use these objectives to develop your tactics for meeting them.

### Tactics

- This is what you'll do to meet your objectives and reach your goals – e.g.:
  - Write one news release and send to X media outlets
  - Pitch the story to X magazines
  - Write X editorials
  - Hold X media events
  - Write a story for your website
  - Write a story for your own newsletter/e-newsletter

### Budget

- This is FREE publicity – but it takes people's time to plan, write, make calls, etc.
- Events cost money - even media events (space, equipment rentals such as podium, mic, tables, chairs).
- Volunteers are a great resource – local colleges/universities may have communications programs and students may be willing to volunteer for experience.

### Timeline

- Work-back schedules will help plan and manage time
- If you want your release to run on a certain date – make sure to plan accordingly
- e.g. Want release to run December 12th
  - Writing = 1 day
  - Review = 1-5 days (depends on how many people and how many reviews as well as people's schedules)
  - May also need time to build a distribution list
  - So... start in early December to guarantee you won't be rushed

### Writing a News Release

- Make it news worthy.
- Tell just one story at a time – when you say three things you say nothing.
- Ideally one page and 500 words or less – you can offer background in accompanying documents or via links.
- Use the inverted pyramid structure – most important info at top (editors cut from the bottom up).
- Basically: date, headline, lead (5-Ws), a quote, supporting information, conclusion, boilerplate and contact info (name, number, and email address).

### Writing a News Release

**NATURE CONSERVANCY**  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
27 JAN 2010

**The Race to Save Little Bluestem Alive**

Little Bluestem – The Native Conservancy of Canada (NCC) is excited to announce that it has secured a grant from the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (OMNR) to support its conservation program for this rare grass species. The grant will fund the NCC's ongoing efforts to protect and restore Little Bluestem populations in Ontario.

The NCC is a not-for-profit organization that has been working to protect and restore Ontario's natural heritage since 1982. The organization's mission is to conserve and restore Ontario's natural heritage for the benefit of present and future generations. The NCC is currently working on a number of conservation projects across the province, including the protection and restoration of Little Bluestem populations.

The NCC is a member of the Ontario Federation of Environmental Groups (OFEG) and is a registered charity. For more information about the NCC or its conservation programs, please contact us at 416-291-1234 or [www.natureconservancy.ca](http://www.natureconservancy.ca).

**Contact:**  
NCC  
416-291-1234  
www.natureconservancy.ca

### Writing a News Release: Headline

- Make it catchy but informative – entice the reporter/editor to read on.
- Your main message – include what and where (who if it is a key to your story, i.e. if people focused).
  - ▣ The Race to Save Little Bluestem Alvar
  - ▣ Searching for rare birds in Northumberland County
  - ▣ Family heritage leads to natural heritage protection in Norfolk

### Writing a News Release: Lead

- The lead (first) paragraph should expand on the headline and provide the 5-Ws.
- Include the nearest major centre to clearly locate the news.
- Keep it clear and simple, just the facts – don't jumble multiple messages - don't bury your lead!
- Two or three sentences.
  - ▣ Orillia, ON - The Nature Conservancy of Canada now has less than one month to get all funds in order for the Little Bluestem Alvar project on the Carden Alvar. Completion of this project will create a contiguous 1332-acre (539 hectare) nature reserve, providing critical habitat for declining grassland bird populations and at-risk species.

### Writing a News Release: Quotes

- Use someone high up in your organization like a director, president or board chair, or someone connected to the story like a volunteer, landowner or donor.
- Here you can reiterate part of the main message from your opening paragraph but also get more information out.
  - ▣ "We need to raise \$35,000 from community supporters before the waiver date of August 14th in order to leverage funds from federal and provincial government programs," said Chris Maher, NCC Ontario's Regional Vice President. "Acquiring Little Bluestem Alvar is a rare opportunity and time is running out to raise the required funds and ensure its protection."

### Writing a News Release: Supporting Information

- A couple of paragraphs that support your news – also where a second quote can be used, for example, from a well-known or influential community member.
- This is a good place for stats and facts that support the premise of the release.
  - ▣ Protected grassland bird habitat is vital. The 2009 State of the Birds Report by U.S. conservation groups including Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, reported dramatic declines in grassland birds due to alarming degradation of their habitat. This project is essential towards helping to reverse that trend.

### Writing a News Release: Conclusion

- Wrap-up/Take-home message.
- Reiterate the key message.
  - ▣ Ontarians can help protect this priority habitat by making a gift towards the project. To help protect this globally rare landscape and leave a natural legacy for future generations, please contact NCC's Ria Nicholson at 1-800-465-0029, extension 235, or via email at [ria.nicholson@natureconservancy.ca](mailto:ria.nicholson@natureconservancy.ca).

### Writing a News Release: Boilerplate

- Organization description.
- Factual – no hype or embellishment.
- Use this at the end of every release.
- Use qualifiers like the first/only/largest if possible.
  - ▣ The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) is Canada's leading land conservation organization. Since 1962, NCC has helped to protect more than 2 million acres (800,000 hectares) of ecologically significant land nationwide.

## Writing a News Release: Contact and Other Information

- Be sure to include one or two contacts for the media (name, telephone, email).
- If photographs are available make a note that they are.
- It is also a good idea to note if further interviews are available – this is more important to broadcast media but newspapers may also wish to expand on a story.
- Include links to any online resources that are available or note if background documents are available.

## Sending Your News Release

- Double check that all names, etc. are spelled correctly.
- Get a colleague to review it and get it approved as necessary.
- Using your media contact list, send your release to your contacts as per their preference (e.g. email versus fax, etc.).
- Monday is a great day for releases (“Slow News Monday”) – Friday is not.
- Send your releases in the morning:
  - Newspaper deadlines are in the afternoon – editors and reporters will be too busy to look at your release then.
- When emailing a news release, send your release *in the body of the email*.

## After the Release

- Monitor your target outlets to see who printed your story.
- See what parts of your story they printed:
  - Your story may get cut (and it tends to get cut from the bottom up) – find out what made it in and what didn't to strengthen your next release.
- If no one picked up your release, call a couple of your target outlets and ask why:
  - They may have just had more pressing news but they may not have found it worthy – all feedback will help you write stronger releases.
- Don't be offended if no one picks up the release:
  - You never know what is going to happen that may warrant news coverage on any given day and you may just run a release the same day your local library burns down.

## Too Many Messages!

The Nature Conservancy of Canada joins with its partners in celebrating the protection of the Wilson Island group near Rosspport, Ontario. This \$7.4-million binational initiative is the largest (based on dollar value) conservation project ever completed in Ontario. The landmark acquisition in northwestern Ontario will preserve habitat and species at risk for the long term. It was made possible with significant funding support from the Government of Canada under the Natural Areas Conservation Program, the Province of Ontario and The Nature Conservancy (TNC, based in the United States).

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## When News Happens Without You

- Many media hits are “unearned” – meaning you had no input into the mention.
- This could result from partners' stories or from supporters or detractors mentioning your organization in a topic related to your work.
- Use these opportunities to connect with media outlets.
- If information is incorrect and possibly harmful, you can call to clarify and comment.
- You can also follow-up with a thank you for the mention in the article and offer more information on your organization and/or the topic.

## Pitching Without A News Release

- Used primarily for magazine articles, and tv and radio shows.
- Takes time and effort to form a strong pitch.
- Study the media outlet – find out what their style is, what type of stories they do, and what they have already done.
- Pay attention to particular sections or segments where your story might best fit.
- You can send a pitch to multiple outlets but you need to personalize and tailor each pitch.
- Keep the tone friendly and conversational using clear, simple language (no jargon).

## Writing Your Pitch

- Include a succinct, catchy headline (great email subject line):
  - Digging in for Earth Day: Conservation Volunteering
- Start by asking a question any reader can relate to, but can't answer:
  - Looking for a way to get involved in saving the planet... and yourself?

## Writing Your Pitch (con't)

- Follow up your question with your idea, using anecdotes, statistics or facts in the lead paragraph:
  - The British Trust for Conservation Volunteers showed that outdoor volunteer experiences help improve physical and mental health. NCC's Conservation Volunteers is a hands-on program that lets people learn about nature as they help with important conservation work like planting trees, collecting seeds, or counting butterflies.

## Writing Your Pitch (con't)

- Add supporting information including facts and figures:
  - In 2007, more than 1,000 Conservation Volunteers across Canada put in 9,300 hours of work during 63 events. Some highlights include almost 8,000 native species being planted, 2 tonnes of garbage being removed, and 10 notable species being discovered.
- Include a list of people available for contact and interviews (e.g. volunteers, program managers, external experts).
- For television, include a list of visual elements.

## Writing Your Pitch (con't)

- Make sure you show you know their media outlet by identifying related pieces that have run and the section/segment you are aiming for.
- Make your organization essential to the story.
- Your pitch should include links to supporting and background materials.

## Tip Sheets

- Similar to a news release but less timely, these can be "evergreen" (e.g. tips on greening your home) or seasonal (tips on a green Christmas).
- Tip sheets are formatted like a news release (date, headline, lead, body, boilerplate and contact info).
- Bulleted list of tips or advice on a topic related to your organization's work (e.g. Five Tips to Green your Wedding, How to Attract Pollinators to Your Garden, How to Help Care for your Community Forest).
- The lead paragraph should provide context and need for the tips.
- Get input from an expert (e.g. wedding planner, nursery owner, land manager).
- Tip sheets can be used as-is or as a jumping off point for a bigger story or interview.
- Identify a point of need or interest in your community and go from there.

## Commenting on National Headlines

- Keep an eye out for major stories relating to your organization's area of work.
- When you see something your organization has the expertise to comment on, call your media outlets and offer a local, expert perspective.
- You need to act quickly!
- You can also provide your local media with a list of topics and people your organization has the ability to comment on.
  - e.g. on October 15<sup>th</sup>, WWF made headlines with a report on the environmental challenges facing rivers – your CA or land trust could have provided local comment referencing any work your organization is doing to help protect rivers in your area.

## Being a Friend to the Media

- Be trustworthy:
  - Ensure you have your facts right! Time is limited and media outlets don't have time to check your facts – you can ruin your credibility with media by sending misinformation or errors (e.g. name spelling).
- Provide more resources:
  - Send links or offer more background if requested, including interviews.
- Return media calls promptly:
  - Not only could you miss your opportunity for comment and be replaced by a competing agency, you lose media confidence. They probably won't call you back and may not be receptive to future pitches.

## Being a Friend to the Media (con't)

- Meet face-to-face:
  - In a community setting, this is easy and beneficial. Offer to take them for a coffee. Don't pitch – get to know them, ask what they like to write about, tell them a little about the work your organization does, ask them if they would be open to future pitches.
- Say THANK YOU!
  - I thank reporters who run particularly good stories and who come to media events. It gives you an opportunity to see if they have any follow-up questions and maintains a positive connection.

## Remember:

- Become a media nerd - know everything about your local media outlets!
- Nurture your media relationships - respond, thank them, invite them to non-media events, take them for coffee, and be respectful of their time.
- Only send a news release when you have news – the quickest way onto a reporter's or editor's blacklist is to send them newsless junk.
- Set up Google Alerts to monitor your organization's name and some key topics.
- Human interest stories sell – use your volunteers, donors, etc. to angle your news.
- Send your releases before noon and try to avoid Fridays.

Good Luck!

QUESTIONS?