

Introduction to Media Relations

The terms “public relations” and “media relations” are often used interchangeably. They are, however, not the same. Public relations is a process involving many facets, including but not limited to research and analysis, advocacy, special events, and the creation of an organization’s image using print and electronic publications.

Media relations is one facet of public relations, and involves working with various media outlets for the purpose of disseminating information about your Friends Group’s specific programs and activities, while increasing the overall awareness of your group.

Remember the media is only one part of a successful public relations campaign. There are a variety of public relations tools to bring attention to your Friends Group and to garner support for your programs and activities.

In this section you will find:

- Tips for writing a press release, a letter to the editor, and an op-ed piece
- Templates for press releases that you can customize for your group
- Sample letters to the editor that can be customized for your group
- A sample media alert and calendar listing
- A customized media list for your area

Media Relations Overview

Your local newspapers, and to a lesser extent radio and TV stations, are interested in your Friends' groups news. Some examples of news items that you should send to your local news media include:

- Local events your Friends group is hosting that tie-in to a national nature or environmental observation (e.g. Earth Day)
- Notice of Friends meetings that are open to the public.
- Notice of public meetings with interesting programs or speakers.
- Announcements of upcoming volunteer projects.
- Awards that your Friends group gives or receives.
- New Friends group officers' announcement.
- Information about joint activities you are co-hosting with another service organization.
- Announcements of nature exhibits events or similar events open to the public.
- Fund raising fairs, bazaars, native plant sales etc.
- Fundraiser results.

Your local newspaper

In addition to a daily calendar of events, your local daily newspaper runs a listing of organizations and activities of interest to readers in the Community section. Usually the news in the Community section will focus on a different types of community news on different days of the week or different weekends of the month. For example: children's interest (for parents), volunteers, seniors, religion, Scouts, support groups, etc. Examine your local newspaper every day for a week and make note of the type of news that runs in the community section each day.

To post a notice in any of these regular listings, send your Friends group information via e-mail to the local news, community news or to "calendar listings," as appropriate. Be sure to send your information at least a week in advance of the scheduled publication date.

Who to send your news to

Most weekly newspapers and even some "shoppers" run a regular column of local events and will publish as many nonprofit news items as fits around the paid advertising. Send all news releases to the weekly newspaper's editor.

Your regional daily newspaper organizes news in a way that is convenient for readers to find and has several editors in charge of different sections of the paper. Here are some general guidelines:

Local Briefs (local news editor)

Local news editors gather news into well-labeled and organized “brief” sections. If you look through the pages of your local paper you will notice several brief’s sections such as as “Local briefs,” “Religion briefs” and “Business briefs.” Briefs are essentially very short stories of similar types that are grouped together. News about your Friends groups’ event or promotion would likely run as a brief.

Arts & Entertainment or Weekend Editor

In addition to briefs about community organizations and events, newspapers run briefs on local arts and entertainment or weekend events under a separate heading or in a different section usually called: “Arts & Entertainment” or “Weekend.” If your friends group is hosting a special event that will take place over a weekend and is open to the public this is an appropriate place for that news.

Calendar

In addition to briefs, newspapers run a daily “Calendar,” which briefly lists items of general interest that are open to the public that day. The time and location of a concert, community play or lecture would likely be listed in the calendar. Sometimes items that are in the calendar also appear in expanded form as briefs leading up to the event. Your Friends groups’ regular monthly meeting should run in the newspaper’s calendar section.

Community News Editor

Any news about your Friends group would likely appear in the Community section as a short news item. This includes fundraisers, newly elected officers, and upcoming events.

Broadcast News Media

When sending news to a radio station, address your news to the station News Director.

If you have an event that you feel will draw wide participation or that localizes a national observance (such as Earth Day) or national holiday you should let your local TV station know. Address your news item to the TV station’s Assignment Editor. Keep in mind that TV stations are most interested in covering events that have a strong visual aspect, so try to find a way to showing, instead of telling, your story.

Always send news to broadcast media at least a week in advance

How to Write an Op-Ed

Opposite editorials, named for their placement in the paper and commonly called “op-eds,” are longer than letters-to-the-editor (about 250-400 words) and should follow the same guidelines. The writing quality and style are much more important in an op-ed piece. Here are some additional tips:

Relevance to what’s in the news

Is an issue important to Pennsylvania’s parks and forests being covered in the news? Is an important vote about to take place in Harrisburg? Tie your topic into an upcoming vote, nature holiday (such as Earth Day), community event, the release of a state environmental report or a recent article. Keep in mind that editorial boards could take up to a week or more to review op-ed submissions.

Tell a story

It’s often best to begin with a short story or anecdote illustrating how the issue affects an individual or group of people in the local community.

Check the newspaper’s submission requirements

Many newspapers require submissions by email, and some require you to submit a piece exclusively to them. Also look for the length and format requirements--usually published in the editorial section--and follow them exactly.

Consider your options

If you don’t have any luck with your city daily newspaper, see if the local weeklies or neighborhood and suburban papers run opinion pieces. Many of them are hungry for articles.

Be accurate and credible

Use relevant statistics and facts to back up your statements. The Communicators’ Toolkit has key PPF messages on a range of issues and highlights how they affect the state economy, people’s health, the environment, etc.

Consider the messenger

You may wish to invite respected or influential members of your community to co-sign or co-write an op-ed with you to increase the chances of publication. Academics or environmental experts are some examples of people who bring credibility to an article.

Call to follow-up

You can check the status of your submission by calling the editorial page editor about your issue. Even if you are not successful in getting published this time, you will learn what they are looking for and they will get to know you as a local subject matter expert about state public lands. This will open the door to possible future opinion pieces or perhaps the editor will invite you to an editorial board meeting where you can talk about your topic to several members of the editorial staff.

How to Write a Press Release

If you are holding an event and want to attract local media, writing a news release can be a good way to get the word out. But to be effective your release must be concise and communicate why your event is newsworthy. Here are some tips:

Use the correct format

At the top of your press release, above the headline, write "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE" followed by the date you are issuing the release. Then on the right margin include the name, day and evening phone number, and email address of a person to contact for more information. At the bottom of the release, include a boilerplate that briefly describes your Friends Group.

Write a short, compelling headline

The headline is the most important line in any press release. Most journalists decide whether or not to read the release based on the headline alone. Use a single tight action verb to describe the event or activity you are trying to promote and avoid adjectives and adverbs. Try to use 10 words or fewer in your headline.

Pack the most important information into the first paragraph

Information in your release should be organized in descending order of importance. Journalists call this the "inverted pyramid" style. The first paragraph is called the "lede" and it should include the most important facts you need to communicate: Who is organizing the event? What is it about? Where will it take place? (be very specific) When will it take place? and why are you doing it?

Provide more details in the paragraphs that follow

In the remainder of the press release, tell the most interesting thing about the event. Who is participating? How many do you expect? Why is it important to the local community and what does your group hope to achieve?

Be sure to include why your event is important to the local community. Why should people care about or attend your event?

Is there a photo opportunity?

Alert editors to any interesting visuals that would make good photographs by including the words "PHOTO OP" at the top of your release, near where you have FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE.

Plan ahead, know and adhere to the newspaper's copy deadlines

Send the release to your local daily, weekly and – if you are announcing something well enough in advance--monthly newsletters.

Be sure to submit the release before the paper's submissions deadline. Most daily papers need to have your release up to a week in advance. Weeklies may need up to a month in advance and monthlies may need it several months in advance.

How to Write a Letter to the Editor

Elected officials may not always thoroughly read every piece of mail they receive, but they carefully monitor newspapers to gauge local opinion. By writing a letter to the editor of your local paper and mentioning your senators or representative by name and stating the specific legislative action you would like them to take, will almost guarantee that your letter will catch the attention of your members of Congress.

Here are some tips to help you write a letter to your local newspaper. Please let PPF know if your letter is published so they can put a copy up on their website.

Keep it short and simple

Try to limit your letter to 100-200 words or fewer, and focus on a single issue. In the first paragraph, state your main point and why the issue is important to you. What impact does the issue have on your local community? How are you personally invested in a particular policy or piece of legislation? Provide any facts, quotes, or numbers in the second paragraph. Use the last paragraph to make your recommendation. Use clear, simple language and simple declarative sentences. You want everyone who reads your letter to quickly grasp your most important message.

Respond to a news story

Start your letter with a specific reference to a recent (no older than a few days) news story, editorial, or previous letter. Be sure to mention the title of the story and the date when it ran. You might also mention the name of the reporter who wrote the story. "Recent" means no older than a few days.

Explain the local connection

Your letter will be more interesting to editors of your local paper if you highlight the local impact of a state policy issue.

Demonstrate your reach

If you are writing on behalf of your local Friends group, be sure to mention it. Newspaper opinion page editors are very interested in the views of citizen groups in their community. However, do not submit a letter signed by several representatives of your group since most newspapers limit signatures to one or two names. Sign your letter and then state your position and the group you are speaking for. For example: Jon Smyth, president, Friends of Tyler State Park, a chapter of the Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation.

Consider all your options

For the best chance of publication, submit letters to your local daily paper. However, you may certainly submit to statewide publications as well. Also consider suburban or neighborhood weekly papers, regional and outdoors or nature-oriented magazines.

Sample Media Submissions

1. Media Advisory
2. Event Calendar Submission
3. Press Releases
 - a. Earth Day
 - b. Fall Foliage
 - c. Migration

Print on Friends Group Letterhead or type
Name and
Address at top

**MEDIA ADVISORY (12 pt., bold) if relevant, also add PHOTO OPPORTUNITY
DATE (12pt., bold)**

Contact: PR contact name Title or position (11 pt.)
Friends Group Name
Phone Numbers (Day, evening and cell phone)

HEADLINE (14 pt., bold, center)

Try to keep headline to 10 words or fewer. Make sure it has a verb; do not use adjectives or adverbs.)

WHO: Friends group sponsoring/hosting event, who is involved – especially note any prominent individuals—such as local legislators attending. (12 pt.)

WHAT: Describe what the event is. Focus on the action, such as “will perform a _____, will demonstrate how to _____—NOT “will discuss, will talk, will present.” Action is interesting; talk is boring.

WHERE: Where the event is taking place; be specific. Include directions if necessary to make it easy for the media to find and attend. Directions can be included below in “Details.”

WHEN: List the time(s) and date(s). Be precise.

WHY: Describe in one sentence why the event is taking place and why it’s of interest to the media/local community.

DETAILS: Include a few sentences of background information about the event and your Friends group. Mention possible photo/video opportunities, other visuals. List your web site address or other resource where the media can access more information.

Notes:

1. A media advisory is **not** a press release. Try to keep it to one page.
2. Email or fax it to your media contacts 2–3 days prior to your event.
3. Follow up with key media via phone to learn if they are covering. If not, ask if they would like to receive photos of the event to publish afterwards.

Most daily and many weekly newspapers publish a “Calendar” section which briefly lists events that are open to the public. If the calendar editor thinks your event could be of wider interest he or she may refer it to the community editor who will expand it into a community section “brief” before your event. Here’s how to compose a submission for your paper’s calendar section. It’s important to keep calendar items short. For daily papers send at least two weeks in advance, sooner is better. For weekly papers send four to six weeks in advance. Check your local paper’s deadline requirements in the calendar section or in their online edition.

As with a press release or media alert, always include your name, Friends Group, and media contact information at the top of your announcement. Then type:

Friends of _____ State [Park or Forest] will hold a _____ at [TIME],

[DATE] at [LOCATION]. The event is free and open to the public. [If admission is being charged,

be sure state how much and what the proceeds will be used for.] For more information, contact

_____ at XXX-XXX-XXXX or email name@email.com.

Date:

Contact:

Telephone:

E-mail:

Website:

Facebook:

[Insert Friends Group Name] Hosts Earth Day [Name Type of Earth Day Event, e.g., Clean Up] at [Name of Pennsylvania state park or forest]

[Insert city/Pa.] -- Residents of Earth are invited to participate in an Earth Day celebration at [Name of park/forest] to help make our environment a better place to live. [Name of friends group] makes improvements at the [choose: park or forest] throughout the year and invites others on [Date of event] to join in [Describe in simple, action verbs, e.g., clearing paths, etc.] to [Briefly explain outcome of work planned, e.g., create better access for getting to the river, etc.].

State budget cuts make it difficult for Pennsylvania's dedicated parks and forestry staff to fully maintain and improve [name of park or forest]. Since Earth Day [Last year, e.g., 2012], [Name of friends group] has volunteered [number of volunteer hours] hours [Describe work done since last year in simple, action verbs, e.g., laying stone paths, clearing brush, etc.] at the [Choose: park or forest].

"[One to two line quote from group contact on how work described above will benefit park/forest users now that this project is completed, e.g., walk on paths now lined with wood chips, etc.]," said [capitalized title of contact] [contact's name].

[Name of Friends' Group] supports Pennsylvania's Constitution that was amended in 1970 to include an environmental article stating:

The people have a right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic, and aesthetic values of the environment. Pennsylvania's public natural resources are the common property of all the people, including generations yet to come. As trustees of these resources, the Commonwealth shall conserve and maintain them for the people.

-more-

To help conserve our resources, join **[Name of Friends' Group]** for the Earth Day **[Type of Event, e.g., Clean Up, Celebration, etc.]** at **[Name of park/forest]**. For more information visit: **[Friends' group web site address]**.

###

[Name of friends group] partners with The Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation, a non-profit that supports Pennsylvania's 120 state parks and 2.2 million acres of forest by coordinating volunteers, activities and donations to encourage recreation, healthier life styles, education, and natural/cultural resources. Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation helps maximize the economic and environmental benefits from our parks and forests. Founded in 1999, Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation has 34 chapters.

For more information, visit www.PaParksAndForests.org and follow us on [Facebook](#).

Date:

Contact:

Telephone:

E-mail:

Website:

Facebook:

The Work of [Insert Friends Group Name] Maintaining [Name of Pennsylvania state park or forest] Pays Off for Fall Foliage Viewing

[Insert city/Pa.] -- Trees light up during sunny fall mornings and afternoons in Pennsylvania's parks and forests creating a glow for all to enjoy. The crimsons, golds, emeralds, tans, and bronzes of tree canopies are worth a trek down a wooded path, along a stream or up a mountain to take in nature's autumn gift. A ride along tree-lined roads is a true, free pleasure for all to enjoy. **[Name of friends group]** works throughout the year to maintain **[name of Pennsylvania state park or forest]**. This fall, enjoy leaves at their brilliant peak by learning the best dates for viewing in **[name of the area]**.

While state parks and forestry staff work hard to maintain Pennsylvania's natural resources, state budget cuts make it difficult to fully maintain and improve **[name of park or forest]**. In **[name recent time span, e.g., 2012, or this summer, etc.] [name of friends group] [describe in one or two lines project(s) done in this period by using simple, action verbs]** in the **[choose either park or forest without proper name]**.

-more-

This fall, as visitors enjoy the visual spectacle in **[name of park or forest]**, they will **[in one or two lines, use simple, action verbs to describe how visitors will benefit from the friends' work described above, e.g., walk on paths now lined with wood chips, etc.]**.

“[One or two line quote from friends group contact on the number of work hours for tasks described above, and the estimated amount of money saved through volunteer efforts],” said **[capitalized title of contact] [name of contact]**.

For more information on the best dates for leaf peeping in **[Name of park or forest]**, visit:

<http://www.visitpa.com/leaf-peepers-upstatepa> the last week of September for updated viewing information.

###

[Name of friends group] partners with The Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation, a non-profit that supports Pennsylvania's 120 state parks and 2.2 million acres of forest by coordinating volunteers, activities and donations to encourage recreation, healthier life styles, education, and natural/cultural resources. Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation helps maximize the economic and environmental benefits from our parks and forests. Founded in 1999, Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation has 34 chapters.

For more information, visit www.PaParksAndForests.org and follow us on [Facebook](#).

Date:

Contact:

Telephone:

E-mail:

Website:

Facebook:

Fall Migration Birding Made Better in [Name of Pennsylvania state park or forest] by [Insert Friends Group Name]

[Insert city/Pa.] -- Rare, common and endangered birds migrate through Pennsylvania during October. The occasional watcher and the serious "birder" can find perches in **[name of Pennsylvania state park or forest]** to view the fall migration of **[name bird species migrating in the area]**. **[Name of friends group]** works throughout the year to help maintain **[choose: park or forest]**. A better maintained **[choose: park or forest without proper name]** gives birds a place to rest and bird watchers a better park from which to spot them.

State budget cuts make it difficult for Pennsylvania's dedicated parks and forestry staff to fully maintain and improve **[name of park or forest]**. In **[name recent time span, e.g., 2012, or this summer, etc.]** **[name of friends group]** **[describe in one or two lines project(s) done in this period by using simple, action verbs]** in the **[choose: park or forest without proper name]**.

[Name of friends group] donated **[estimated volunteer hours]** hours of volunteer services for the **[choose: project or projects]** and saved the Commonwealth **[number of volunteer hours x \$21.79]** in labor costs.

-more-

“[One to two line quote from group contact on how work described above will benefit bird watchers this fall, e.g., walk on paths now lined with wood chips, etc.],” said [capitalized title of contact] [contact’s name].

[Name of friends group] is committed to improving [name of park or forest] for all to enjoy because [in one or two lines explain how friends group’s commitment benefits all park visitors].

For more information on the best spots for sighting birds at **[Name of park or forest]**, visit:

www.birding.com/wheretobird/pennsylvania.asp.

###

[Name of friends group] partners with The Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation, a non-profit that supports Pennsylvania’s 120 state parks and 2.2 million acres of forest by coordinating volunteers, activities and donations to encourage recreation, healthier life styles, education, and natural/cultural resources. Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation helps maximize the economic and environmental benefits from our parks and forests. Founded in 1999, Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation has 34 chapters.

For more information, visit www.PaParksAndForests.org and follow us on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/PaParksAndForests).