

VIRGINIA MAIN STREET **PRESS RELEASE KIT**

A MAIN STREET COMMUNITY
GUIDE TO EARNED MEDIA

Letterpress
Communications



THE BASICS OWNED, EARNED & PAID CHANNELS

Owned Media

Channels your organization controls directly, such as platforms you own and manage. These channels allow you to communicate your brand's message without external interference.

Examples:

- Website and blog content
- Email newsletters
- "Rented Channel" - Social media profiles (e.g., posts on your business's Facebook or Instagram)

Earned Media

Publicity or exposure you gain organically through word-of-mouth, third-party endorsements or media coverage. These are not paid for but earned by building strong relationships, credibility, or great content.

Examples:

- Mentions in newspapers, magazines, or blogs
- Reviews and testimonials
- Social media shares, comments, or discussions about your brand

Paid Media

Channels where you pay to promote your message or content to a targeted audience. This form of communication ensures your message reaches your desired audience more quickly.

Examples:

- Google Ads or pay-per-click campaigns
- Social media ads (e.g., sponsored posts on Meta or LinkedIn)
- Print, radio, or TV advertisements
- Community Opportunities - Sponsorships, local events, etc.

PRO TIP

Always point your audience back to your owned channels. This is the best way to measure your return on investment.

PRESS RELEASE BEST PRACTICES + PRO TIPS

Use the “inverted pyramid” structure.

This is a writing format used by news outlets that puts the most important information in a story (who, what, where and when) at the very top, often in the first sentence (sometimes called the “lead sentence” or “lead paragraph”). The purpose of this structure is to convey the main point early so that if a person stops reading, they’ll still leave with the most pertinent information. Secondary or supporting information should follow in ensuing paragraphs in order of importance.

Be concise and organized.

Related to the “inverted pyramid” structure, the goal of a press release is to notify or inform your audience about your subject as quickly as possible. Refrain from using unnecessary adjectives and including unnecessary information that can drain your reader’s attention.

Include research and data.

Media outlets deal in facts, and facts are most easily supported by data. If you have supporting research or data related to the premise of your press release, be sure to summarize and cite it.

Let facts tell the story.

Press releases should seek to inform your audience, not persuade – at least not explicitly. They should not be written in a way that outwardly elicits emotions like a feature story might, but instead should be an organized presentation of facts. Refrain from using language and punctuation (exclamation points) that seems flowery or too persuasive. With press releases, careful organization and presentation of facts can influence a reader more than flowery language.

Include a quote from a representative of your organization or a subject matter expert.

Related to “letting the facts tell the story,” quotes are a great way to “color” your press release with commentary and put a subtly subjective spin on the story. Because quotes are attributed to a person and not an impartial writer, they have more flexibility to show emotion or excitement and add perspective to the facts you’re presenting. Note that all quotes should add something to the press release, whether it’s offering new information or reinforcing an important point.

PRESS RELEASE BEST PRACTICES + PRO TIPS

Include visual assets, such as photos and videos.

If a media outlet ends up being interested enough to run a story based on your press release, their most likely follow-up question will be to send a photo or video related to the story. Pre-empt that question by attaching those materials (or even better, including a link to a gallery or shared folder) along with the press release. Even something as simple as a headshot of the representative quoted in your press release can be useful to a newspaper.

End the press release with your organizational boilerplate.

This is a brief paragraph that shares general information about your organization including your mission, location, successes and history. It should be preceded by a header, similar to “About [Town] Main Street.”

PRO TIP

Writing Press Releases with AI

- **Start with a Clear Goal:** Use AI to outline key details like the purpose, audience and newsworthy content.
- **Provide Specifics:** Include essential facts (e.g., names, dates, stats) in your AI prompts for better results.
- **Refine with AI Tools:** Use tools like Grammarly for clarity, consistency and professionalism.
- **Keep It Newsworthy:** Focus on launches, milestones, or industry updates.

For more details, check out Grammarly’s full guide [here](#).

TEMPLATE GRANT ANNOUNCEMENT

PLACE YOUR
LOGO HERE



Media Contact:
Name
Organization
Email address
Phone number

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Headline goes here. Do not initial caps.
Subhead goes here with additional description

Month XX, YYYY (CITY/TOWN, Va.) - For a traditional press release, use inverted pyramid style with the most important information (who, what, when and where) included in this first paragraph. Since this press release is about a grant, you should include the name of the awarding agency or organization, the recipient, dollar amount (if public) and what, in general, it will fund.

The second paragraph should expand upon the crucial information you included in the first paragraph. You may also use this paragraph to share the next-most important information if you were unable to fit it in the first paragraph. For example, if a grant is funding building revitalization, the second paragraph can include specifics about location of the buildings or details about what will be revitalized.

"The third or fourth paragraph is a good place to include a quote," said Jane Doe, Administrator for Town. "A best practice for quotes is to reiterate the point of the story, adding another layer of insight or perspective. For press releases about grants, this quote is a great opportunity to express excitement or appreciation from the town or organization the speaker represents."

You can include more important details about the grant in the next paragraph. Depending on the information you're sharing, you could consider adding a bulleted list. For example, if the grant you're announcing has already been earmarked for specific projects, you could list them out in bullet points below, like this:

- Grant-funded project #1
- Grant-funded project #2
- Grant-funded project #3

Assume that you have lost many of your readers by this point in the press release. Any information shared here should only be supportive – not crucial – to the main idea of the

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TEMPLATE EVENT ANNOUNCEMENT

PLACE YOUR
LOGO HERE



Media Contact:

Name
Organization
Email address
Phone number

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Headline goes here. Do not initial caps.

Subhead goes here with additional description

Month XX, YYYY (CITY/TOWN, Va.) - For a traditional press release, use inverted pyramid style with the most important information included in this first paragraph. Since this press release is about an event, the logistical information (what, where, when) will be important to share very early in the story, as well as announcements about special guests or speakers.

The second paragraph should expand upon the crucial information you included in the first paragraph. You may also use this paragraph to share the next-most important information if you were unable to fit it in the first paragraph. For example, if an event is a conference or luncheon, you could list prominent individuals scheduled to speak, cost to attend or RSVP instructions.

"The third or fourth paragraph is a good place to include a quote," said Jane Doe, Administrator for Town. "A best practice for quotes is to reiterate the point of the story, adding another layer of insight or perspective. For events, this quote is a good opportunity for the speaker to express excitement for the event and appreciation for the speaker's appearance."

You can include more important details about the event in the next paragraph. Depending on the event, you could consider adding a bulleted list. For example, if there are multiple facets of the event, you can put them in a schedule format here:

- 12 p.m. – Networking
- 12:15 p.m. – Welcome & introductions
- 12:20 p.m. – Guest speaker
- 12:50 p.m. – Conclusion

Assume that you have lost many of your readers by this point in the press release. Any information shared here should only be supportive – not crucial – to the main idea of the

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TEMPLATE COMMUNITY IMPACT ANNOUNCEMENT

PLACE YOUR
LOGO HERE



Media Contact:

Name
Organization
Email address
Phone number

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Headline goes here. Do not initial caps.

Subhead goes here with additional description

Month XX, YYYY (CITY/TOWN, Va.) - For a traditional press release, use inverted pyramid style with the most important information included in this first paragraph. Since this press release is about how a grant, event or initiative impacted your community, the paragraph should include what impact was made (increase in tax revenue, increase in foot traffic, decrease in vacant storefronts, etc.) and the catalyst for that impact (grant, event, initiative, etc.).

The second paragraph should expand upon the crucial information you included in the first paragraph. You may also use this paragraph to share the next-most-important information if you were unable to fit it in the first paragraph. For example, if you're trying to show impact, you can expand more on what the data shows, why the impact is important for your town, and its historical context.

"The third or fourth paragraph is a good place to include a quote," said Jane Doe, Administrator for Town. "A best practice for quotes is to reiterate the point of the story, adding another layer of insight or perspective. For community impact, this quote is a good opportunity for the speaker to express excitement about the impact and appreciation for all who made it possible."

You can include more important details in the next paragraph, including information supporting what the speaker said in the quote above. However, you should assume that you have lost many of your readers by this point in the press release.

Any information shared at this point in the press release should only be supportive – not crucial – to the main idea of the story. However, readers who reach this part of the press release are likely to be more invested and therefore will appreciate additional details you can provide.

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PRESS RELEASE CHECKLIST

Press Release Writing

- ☐ Inverted pyramid structure (most important information first!)
- ☐ Strong and informative lead sentence/paragraph
- ☐ Quote from organizational representative
- ☐ Organizational boilerplate at conclusion

Press Release Email/Pitch

- ☐ Cordial and personalized greeting for recipient
- ☐ Pitch part 1: Brief (1-2 sentences) summary of press release
- ☐ Pitch part 2: Explanation of why story is relevant to outlet's audience
- ☐ Full press release (body of email or attached as PDF)
- ☐ Assets or links to assets (photos, videos, etc.)
- ☐ Call to action (CTA)
- ☐ Conclusion ("Thank you for your coverage!")

Press Release Sending

- ☐ Initial email (see Press Release Email/Pitch checklist above)
- ☐ Phone call follow-up to confirm receipt (same day as send)
- ☐ Email or phone follow-up (within two days of initial send if no response)
- ☐ Thank you note to outlet for publishing (or thanking for consideration if declined)

MEDIA RELATIONS GET YOUR NEWS PICKED UP

Best Practices for Media Relations

Writing a good press release is only half of the equation when it comes to getting your news published. The other half is media relations, which includes knowing the media landscape for your area and building relationships with relevant media outlets.

Media relations starts with establishing personal connections with editors, reporters and other staff members at your local media outlets. A simple introductory email or periodic check-in with an editor or reporter can build those relationships and increase the chances that your news item, when you have one, gets appropriate consideration for publishing.

The most important point to consider when working with members of the media is that their outlet does not exist to serve any one organization, agency or business – including your Main Street organization. They exist to provide value to their subscribers, readers, listeners and viewers.

Therefore, any news you hope to have a media outlet publish – no matter how important it seems to you – should also have significant relevance to that media outlet's audience. If you can make the pitch to an editor or reporter that your news item is relevant to their audience, they are much more likely to consider publishing it.

In terms of what makes a good news item relevant to an outlet's audience, here are several of the most common examples:

- New funding and revenue sources (grants received, investments made, etc.)
- New business openings
- New hirings
- Leadership changes
- Changes in noteworthy metrics (foot traffic, tax revenue, new businesses opened, occupied storefronts, etc.)
- Business success stories
- Business/property owner profiles
- Awards and other recognitions
- Strategic or capital planning initiatives

MEDIA RELATIONS GET YOUR NEWS PICKED UP

Best Practices for Media Relations – Continued

Once you have a captivating news item, a press release explaining it, and accompanying assets (photos, video, etc.), you need to get it in front of the right people at the right publications. Compiling a media contact list is a great way to not only stay organized but also develop a greater understanding of your media landscape – be it local, regional, statewide or even national.

A good media list should include the following information for all outlets in and around your area:

- Publication name and type (i.e., newspaper, radio, television, blog, magazine)
- Publication coverage area (i.e., your county, surrounding counties, Central Virginia)
- Publication schedule (i.e., Wednesday and Friday)
- Publication deadlines (i.e., Monday at 2 p.m. for Wednesday's edition)
- Contact information for editor(s) and/or publisher(s) (email and/or phone)
- Contact information for reporter(s) assigned to your area (email and/or phone)

It's also important to update those lists at least every six months, as personnel at media outlets can change regularly. The hiring of a new editor or reporter is a great opportunity to start building a relationship and ensure future coverage.

When it comes time to send a press release and make your pitch for coverage, be sure you have selected (from your media list!) the outlet(s) for which the news is most relevant. If time allows, it's always better to send individual emails to each outlet's editor and/or reporter, as opposed to an impersonal email blast. A good pitch should include not only the press release, but several other elements listed below:

- Greeting
- "Pitch" briefly summarizing story and explaining why the outlet should cover it
- Press release (either copied into the body of the email or attached as small-sized PDF)
- Link to assets related to the story (photos and/or videos)
- Invitation to schedule a follow-up interview with a Main Street representative, if desired
- Call for a response ("Is this something [name of media outlet] would be able to publish in next Friday's edition?")
- A thank you!

MEDIA RELATIONS GET YOUR NEWS PICKED UP

Best Practices for Media Relations – *Continued*

After sending the email, you can also give a follow-up phone call to the outlet to ensure they received it. You can also follow up within a day or two to resurface the email in their inbox and ask if they need any more information for the story.

If the outlet does end up running a story about your news, be sure to thank them for the coverage. If they decline to run a story, thank them for the consideration and ask what types of news items they would be interested in covering in the future. Remember, media relations is about building relationships, and there will always be more news items to pitch!

PRO TIPS

Audience First: Pitch stories relevant to the media outlet's audience, not just your organization.

Be Resourceful: Share complete materials upfront (photos, videos, contacts).

Follow-Up Respectfully: Be polite but persistent with emails or calls.

Maintain Positivity: Thank outlets for coverage or consideration, even if declined.

Support Reporters: Facilitate logistics and prepare interviewees, especially if your news prompted an in-person interview from a reporter.

Correct Professionally: Address errors politely with clear documentation.

Build Relationships: Keep an updated media contact list to streamline future pitches.

MEDIA RELATIONS CHECKLIST

Weekly/Biweekly

- ☐ Search internet and browse local media for news coverage about your organization
- ☐ Complete social media engagement (respond to comments, invite people to like your page, share posts from community partners, etc.)
- ☐ Browse local media outlets for news ideas
- ☐ Share your news articles with your audience and name/tag the publication

Monthly/Quarterly

- ☐ Browse statewide and national media outlets for related news and trends
- ☐ Update “Year in Review” folder/document with links to news coverage

Biannually

- ☐ Update media contact list
- ☐ Check in with local media members

Annually

- ☐ Compile news coverage into “Year in Review” document

PRO TIP

Need help brainstorming your earned media partners?
Check out this [worksheet](#) to help create your PR Plan.

OWNED CHANNELS TELL YOUR STORY

Share Your News!

After sending your press release, don't forget to share it across your owned channels to amplify its reach and encourage others to share. Here are a few ways to do so:

Website

Add your press release to the "News" section of your website. Use this link to share on other platforms like social media and newsletters.

Email Newsletter

Include the first paragraph of your press release as a teaser in your newsletter. Add a "Read More" button linking to the full release on your website. Bonus points for including a photo or video!

Social Media

Post a short, announcement-style update with a link to the full press release. Enhance engagement with an image or video. Check out the templates below!

PRO TIP

Measure Your Success

You've invested time and effort into crafting your news content — now ensure you're evaluating its impact. Here are a few ways to measure success:

- **Website Traffic:** Use Google Analytics to track visits to your news page and specific pages.
- **Email Engagement:** Monitor clicks in your newsletter.
- **Social Media Metrics:** Track likes, shares, and comments on your posts.
- **Media Coverage:** Monitor how many outlets picked up your press release. Set up Google Alerts to stay informed.

TEMPLATES CANVA SOCIAL GRAPHICS



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While logged into Canva, click the link above and select "use template in a new design" to add to your Canva. Then customize with your branding!

Bonus! These templates are animated. You can download them as an image or video!



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