

How to... generate press coverage

The more frequent and interesting the media coverage about your activities, the more people will be encouraged to get involved and support you.

Top tips for a good story

To receive coverage in the media you need a newsworthy story. This can come from many angles, so be sure to think creatively.

Consider the following:

- What distinguishes your group from other community gardening groups?
- Are your activities linking into the local area, its history and people? A strong local connection will generate interest from local media. Perhaps your project is inspired by a local person or you might be renovating a piece of local heritage or using plants native to your region.
- Are you engaging people in an innovative way, perhaps working with a hard to reach audience?
- Are you bringing a new approach to traditional activities – such as updating planting in bedding schemes to reduce water use, or creating wildlife habitats in reclaimed urban areas etc.?
- Are you offering the community something new? For example have you launched a project to address local needs/ create new links within the community, e.g. a joined-up project between a school and a care-home to provide vegetables for elderly residents?
- Have you transformed an area (e.g. a 'before and after' story)? Good 'before' photos are vital for this.
- Have you just secured a new sponsor – won lottery funding etc? The paper will want to know your plans for spending the money/ using the support.
- Do you have a notable celebrity or local personality linked to your entry? Even if you just have a supportive quote from a local celebrity who agrees with what you're doing, this kind of backing will always help to attract more media attention.

The press are also interested in the human angle. Is there a story about the people involved in your group? Perhaps volunteering with your group has helped someone back into work, led to a marriage, or helped somebody to cope with a loss or turn their life around? If your volunteers are happy to talk to the press about their personal stories, this can be a good way to raise your group's profile in a positive way. People reading may relate to the story themselves and contact your group to get involved.

Contacting the press

The easiest media for you to target will be your regional/local press by issuing a [press release](#).

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Regional daily, weekly and Sunday newspapers: Before you send in your story, consider which section of the paper it would best fit in (news; features; gardening supplement etc.) and call the relevant journalist to run through the story and ask if you can email them a press release.

TV and Radio: When contacting your local TV or radio station, call the newsdesk for the programme you want to target (e.g. Drive Time or BBC Look North) and ask for the forward planning person who will be looking after the news on the day of your event.

Top tips on writing a press release

- Key information should come in the first paragraph: What is happening? Why? Where? When? Who is involved? Many press releases don't get read below the opening paragraph so make sure you sum it up here.
- A punchy, eye-catching title will capture attention.
- Be accurate and informative – ask someone to proof it for typos before you send it!
- Don't waffle; the ideal press release is one side of A4.
- Include a quote or testimonial from yourself, a sponsor, a local dignitary, a volunteer or celebrity.
- Make sure your contact details are in the Notes to Editors at the end of the release, should the journalist have any follow-up queries.
- Send a low-res copy of your image with the release, and clearly state in the Notes to Editors that you have a higher resolution version available.
- Always write 'Press Release' across the top of the page and include the date to be released (for example 'For Immediate Release', or 'Embargoed until 30 September 2012') along with any group logo.

What else can you do?

Use events: If you are planning an event, invite the paper to send a reporter and photographer along on the day. Plan a photocall – a specific time at the event where you will have key people in place for photos – and invite your local paper to send a photographer along. Send out a press release clearly summarising what you are doing and including the invitation to the photocall. Try to confirm before the event whether anyone from the paper will be attending and make sure you give them your mobile phone number. You should identify yourself at the event and, if required, help them to get the information and pictures they need.

With a daily paper, a press release should usually be sent about a week in advance of your event; for weekly papers you should send your release two to three weeks in advance.

Surveys: Local press wants to cover the issues that concern its readers/ viewers; if 250 local residents have signed your petition to renovate a communal garden, contact your local paper with a press release.

Target specialist media: Consider specialist media outlets in addition to your local paper, for example: the local community channel, horticultural programmes, tourism magazines, lifestyle magazines, county-wide glossy magazines etc. If you have an idea for a feature, call the features editor and run it by them. Please note: For monthly magazines, lead times (the publication's

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forward-planning editorial schedule) could be as much as three months in advance and even longer for quarterly publications.

Images

Unfortunately the number of staff at local newspapers and magazines has been reduced in recent years due to financial constraints, and so they do not always have the manpower to cover every event themselves. As such you will not only have to become the press officer but also the photographer for your event.

- When taking a photo please consider what makes an interesting image. Shots of people lined up are on the whole dull to look at. The best images are those with some action in them. People doing something while also looking at the camera make excellent images, and even more so if the photographer has angled themselves, so they are either looking up or down at the subject. And remember a picture can be staged, so take your time, arrange your subject and take lots of pictures.
- Press pictures need to be of a high resolution – typically 300dpi minimum. Please set your camera to the highest resolution possible, because if the images are too small they just can't be used.
- When taking a picture always make sure you've got permission from the people in the picture and a full list of names and job titles to put in the caption. You'll also need the photographer's permission that the picture can be used for publicity. It doesn't have to be the copyright, just permission. Without all of these a paper is very unlikely to print the picture. Where children under 18 are featured in photographs a model release form (see publicity materials in online hub for sample) will need to be signed by the parent or guardian, giving their permission for the photo to be used.
- Press often ask for before and after shots, as a way of illustrating the story. So please do keep a record of your activities from the very beginning.
- And finally, when emailing images to the press, only attach a couple of pictures (jpegs or tiffs) to each email, complete with the press release and information about the people in the shot. Don't let your email exceed 5mb; otherwise it may not get through the newspaper's email system.

Tips from groups

- Focus on quirky stories - we re-use old features, for example two disused telephone boxes are now vertical planters, with themed planting linked with current events and the call box, i.e. red/white/blue=jubilee (called "the Queen's Speech") (*Ripon Racecourse in Bloom*)
- Appoint a 'Media Officer' to look after publicity. Find an angle or a 'hook'. A straightforward report may get you some coverage but a quirky story will get you more. (*Chipping in Bloom*)
- Make contact with reporters from all the local media. Keep them fully informed and ensure that they are invited to any events you are staging. Local papers often have reporters who have responsibility for specific areas. If this applies – get to know them! (*Friends of Devonport Park, IYN*)

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- Get photo consent before you start an activity- making sure they can be used in any kind of publicity. Take lots of photos so you ensure at least one good one, crop them to focus on best parts of the picture. (*Bishop David Sheppard Children's Centre, IYN*)
- Compile a list of all media in the area and send out press releases on a regular basis. (*Caistor in Bloom*)