WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR
PEACE & FREEDOM

Gaining Media Exposure: A How-To Guide

If you're working on a project about funding for Women, Peace, Security or gender equality, you'll need a strategy to get your message heard. Key to drawing the attention of a wider audience is getting the media to take interest.

This practical, step-by-step guide to media outreach and advocacy on Women, Peace and Security-related projects is intended to assist you and your organisation gain media exposure. By following these tips, you can give your project or story the best chance of being published.

Overview: How to contact the media

You can get in contact with the media on a number of different ways. The most common ways are:

- Send a press release
- Send a pitch email
- Call them
- Hold a press conference/ briefing
- Write an editorial/article/blog post for publication.

The WILPF Communications Team believes pitch emails are the most effective way to get in contact with a specific media outlet or journalist, but let us run through all the opportunities above.

Press Release

A press release is a brief mini-article that is sent to all relevant media to announce a newsworthy event (this "event" can be a new campaign, or outcomes of a recent campaign.)

Journalists are often very busy and do not have time to write an article based on a poorly written press release, so it is key that the press release is written in a way journalists can simply copy/paste. It is normally not more than one A4 side (2400 characters including spaces) and is written as a mini-article, meaning that you have a:

- Headline
- Introduction
- Text/ main body

- Ending/conclusion
- Contact information

How to write a press release

When writing, you **follow a "pyramid structure":** lay the foundations in the first paragraph by offering the solution first. All subsequent paragraphs should gradually provide more and more details.

Write an interesting headline that encapsulates the entire story and follow up with a short introduction/ summary of 2-3 lines) that summarises the entire story. This should answer the questions: Who? What? Where? When? Why?

This way, the journalist can quickly understand whether the story can be interesting to their readers.

At the bottom of the press release, **always include contact details**: name, telephone and email of a person they can contact to get further information.

Moreover, you can improve the press release by:

Using short sentences and evidence-based facts

Use an objective style. This means all superlatives should be removed. Journalists like articles based on real concrete facts and figures they can easily verify. An advocacy document such as a statement or a position is of no interest to them and will simply be binned.

Including personal quotes

The press release should also include two or maximum three short quotes from one or two key people involved, better if they are well known and respected, such as Goodwill Ambassadors, celebrities or heads of organisations. Contrary to the rest of the press release, quotes can be very personal as they add human interest to the article.

Offering free pictures

Always offer pictures that journalists can use for their article. Try to attach them to the email or, if their size is too large, include a link at the bottom of the press release where they can be downloaded. Specify that they can be downloaded for free. Remember to add photo credit if any.

When you send your press release by email, there are a number of issues you have to be aware of:

- A press release targets all media. Put all contacts in BCC (We do not want journalists to have access to our list and we do not want them to know we contacted other media outlets.)
- Use a compelling subject line for your email. Journalists receive lots of emails and are very busy. You want to be sure he or she reads your email. Don't just write "press release," or it could just be deleted.
- use a (compelling) headline.
- Include the press release in the body of the email. Again, journalists are quite busy and do not always have the time to open attachments, so it is better to paste your press release into the body of the email. You can of course always attach it in PDF format, so they can print it in a nicer format.
- Tell what is attached. At the bottom of the email, list attachments in bullet point form. This way you can make the journalist aware on that something is attached to the email.

Follow up

When you have sent a press release to the media, follow up on the most important media outlets by phone. Ask whether they received the press release (they often have not, write a new email and send again) and if they are interested in the story. Pick your time before calling: for example, don't call first thing in the morning where they may be scrambling to finalise their day's news lineup or attend editorial meetings.

More quick tips for preparing a press release

- Be clear and concise what about the message you want to convey: identify 3-4 clear and specific messages
- Keep it short: ideally one page and definitively no longer than two pages. Use precise, clear language and active verbs .
- Avoid using technical language.
- Use quotes to make your arguments stronger
- Include clear recommendations and calls for action.

- Start with the most important information at top and leave the background
- information for the end.
- Include links for further information

How to pitch to the media

What does it mean to "pitch" to the media? Pitching means proactively contacting journalists and media outlets to suggest we have a good story they may be interested in covering.
Being in contact with the media is a three-step process:

Step 1: Establishing contact with the media (You contact/ pitch the journalist.)

Step 2: The interview.

Step 3: Follow up. This should be done by your organisation's media focal points.

When you contact/ pitch the media, it is important that you:

- Know the media and understand the journalist
- Are able to see the "good story"
- Contact the media/ journalist in the right way

Knowing the media

When contacting the media/journalists you need to understand their mission. All media outlets are not the same. Each media outlet has its own specific target group. If you need to get your story into that specific media outlet, you need to know which kind of stories it produces and understand its target group.

Remember that the media/journalists are always there for their target group (their readers, listeners, or viewers) and not for you. This means you have to clearly present your story in a way that shows it is appropriate for their target group.

Building a media database

The first step to contacting journalists is building your database of local, regional, national or international media (depending on which type of media is relevant to you). This is also the first step for you in mapping your different target media and getting to know them and their target groups better.

Your media database needs to include both general journalists and specialists in our subjects. If you already have some lists, phone each media to update relevant details. Classify media according to type (radio, TV, paper etc), geographical reach (local, regional, national or international), periodicity (daily, weekly, months) and subject matter/specialised journalists (which can include diplomatic affairs, development issues, gender issues).

You can also add a description of the media outlet's target group, for example "women", "students", "members" etc. If you are unsure about their target group, then you will often find a description on their website. Look under information for advertisers.

Focal Points

Sell your story! Think as a journalist. Getting the media's/ journalist's attention can be quite difficult because we compete with many purveyors of information; this is why it is quite important to carry out careful preparation.

When spotting opportunities for media exposure, you need to make a journalist interested in writing about you. The best way you can do so is to "think like a journalist".

When a journalist works, he or she is looking for a good story and a good story always has at least one of these five criteria:

- Timeliness ("We already told this story last week" = not interesting)
- Essentiality ("Well, what is the angle/perspective of the story?" = not interesting)
- Identification (You need to offer a case study = a real person with a real story)
- Sensation (The story must contain surprising news – "dog bites man" is not a surprise, "man bites dog is")
- Conflict ("We need an opponent for his views" = if you have an opposing or controversial opinion, your story might be interesting)

This means that if you want to make a journalist interested in your story, you have to pitch it in a way where it is obvious that your story covers one or more of the five criteria.

Some secondary criteria

- Solo story: the media outlet is the only one with this story (or case)
- Celebrity: famous people's lives and activities
- Human interest: anything involving strong human emotions
- Inspiration: people exhibiting unusual exemplary behavior

- Special interest: information for groups with special interest: women, ethnic minorities, minorities, students, business people
- Good photo opportunity: goes without saying

Pitch Email

The best way of getting in touch with the media is by sending them a pitch email. As opposed to a press release, a pitch email is a personal email sent to a specific journalist.

Here are some tips for a good pitch email:

- Do all the necessary research to make sure you know enough about the journalist and the readers of the media outlet he or she works for. When you contact the journalist, mention his/ her readers – check who their readers are and what they are interested in on the media outlet's website and use similar language to refer to them.
- Suggest a good idea for a story/ article that can be interesting to their readers. If possible, refer to a past article written by the journalist or published in the media and offer a new angle to the story.
- Offer something special. A pitch email is usually written in informal, subjective style.

Its purpose is to get the journalist interested in our story by offering him/ her something special for his readers.

Article/blog post for publication

Another way you may try to get media exposure for your project is by writing an article (generally, for written publications- think The New York Times) or blog post (for websites or blogs- think The Huffington Post).

The steps to getting an article or blog post published are:

1. Choose the publication(s) you want to submit to. (Note: The etiquette is to offer to one publication at a time, then move to another publication if rejected by the first.)
2. Check that the publications accept submissions: Searching for a "contributors" or "submissions" tab on the publication's website if your best bet.
3. Go ahead and write your article or blog post using the structure and length tips outlined below. (Note: Most publications today only accept full articles or blog posts for

consideration - so unless you're already a well-known public figure, best not to contact the editors to ask if they'd consider your idea before you actually write anything.)

4. Submit your completed article or blog post, along with pictures (include a note of photo credits and suggested captions.) Follow the instructions on the contributors/submissions area of the publication's website or, if you can't find such instructions, email your article or blog post directly to one of the editors.

Topic and angle

When an editor receives your article or blog post, s/he will only consider it for publication if it's newsworthy and relevant to his/her readers (which is not the same as just being a worthy cause, sadly.)

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Structure

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For any blog post or article, you must follow a "pyramid structure". This means laying the foundations in the first paragraph by offering the solution and the key, most newsworthy facts, first. The first paragraph or two need to answer the questions: Who? What? Where? When? Why?

All subsequent paragraphs should gradually provide more and more details.

Tone and voice

Ensure the level of formality and "tone" (humorous, more academic, snarky, dramatic) aligns with what the publication generally publishes.

Familiarise yourself with the audience/readership of your target publication and write for that audience. (If you're writing for Millennials, don't try to make your point by including a pop culture reference that only an older generation will understand, and vice versa.)

Even if you adopt a less formal tone, ensure your article is based on verifiable facts; this will ensure your article or blog post has credibility.

Some starters for findings facts to include in your article

PeaceWomen's website includes a resource centre with more than 22,000 resources related to Women, Peace and Security. You can find it here: http://www.peacewomen.org/resource-center

PeaceWomen's website also includes a comprehensive World Map feature, with detailed country profiles including details of military expenditure of each country, whether that country has a National Action Plan to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325, and updates on the current conflict (if any) in that country. If you're writing an article or blog post about the situation in one particular country, the World Map section is a valuable starting point! You can find it here: http://www.peacewomen.org/countries_and_regions/all

Length

Check the usual approximate word count for the publication you are writing for, and don't exceed their usual word limit.

But remember: concise, punchy writing is far preferred by editors. Save the long sentences and flowery language for academic writing. (Long sentences do not equal better writing - just ask Hemingway.)

The online audience has an extremely short attention span, so avoid writing something that will take more than a couple of minutes to read.

Other writing tips

Remember your audience. Avoid acronyms, jargon or complicated language that the everyday person outside your workplace won't understand.

Avoid using a question as the first sentence in an article or blog post: Many editors dismiss this as "lazy writing."

Always include a human interest case study, including powerful authentic quotes, if possible.

… Don't forget George Orwell's (timeless) rules for effective writing!

1. Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
2. Never use a long word where a short one will do.
3. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
4. Never use the passive where you can use the active.
5. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
6. Break any of these rules sooner than saying anything outright barbarous.