

How To Know If Something Is Newsworthy

If you would like to pitch a news story or interview to a particular editor or reporter, it helps if your pitch has some of the following qualities that may make it newsworthy:

- The story generates compelling images (especially for broadcast news media).
- An elected official or celebrity will be present.
- It is an absolute first.
- You have a personal story of struggle, triumph, or justice.
- You have cultivated a relationship with a news reporter who is interested in repeatedly covering your issues.
- Something has fundamentally changed the nature of your issue.
- Your issue is of legitimate importance to a significant portion of the local population.
- You are available to be interviewed immediately so that reporters can meet their deadlines.
- Your story has been structured to relate to the major news stories of the day.

SHOULD YOU SEND A PRESS RELEASE?

Most advocates want to fax or mail out press releases as a way to let the news media know that they have a local event or an idea for a news story. Press releases are concise, one- to two-page written notices that pitch stories to the news media.

As is the case with so many things, pitching a news story on paper does not convey the power or the urgency that a phone call or in-person meeting with a reporter can have. Press releases arrive at newspapers and television stations by the hundreds, further diminishing their potential impact. Still, if a reporter is interested in a story idea that you have, it may help her to have a summary of the event or issue on paper to aid her in getting permission to cover the story from the editor or news director.

A well-written press release that includes the logo of your institution can help establish your credibility as a community expert if the reporter has never met you, so press releases do have their uses. It's a mistake to write a press release and fax it to hundreds of news media outlets hoping that some of them will bite. In most cases, none will. Your time is much better spent calling a few local reporters whom you know have an understanding of your issues and talking with

them directly to pitch a story idea. Then follow up the conversation with a press release so that the reporter has something on paper to share with others in planning meetings.

To find contact information for your local news media outlets, try www.newslink.org or www.newsdirectory.com.

Adapted from Christopher Kush's *The One-Hour Activist*, Jossey-Bass, 2004.