

Get the Word Out!
A Manual for Press Releases

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of New Hampshire

June 2005

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Special thanks to

Edith Tucker of the *Coos County Democrat* for contributions and feedback,

the **NH Humanities Council** for permission to use parts of their Publicity Tip Sheet from *Humanities To Go!*

Susan Day, Ph.D., for proofing and feedback.

New Hampshire's Historical Societies--See 'em and muse!

Introduction

The **purpose** of this handbook is to be a resource to NH's historical societies and small cultural institutions in the arena of advertising.

Historical societies have two principle responsibilities--to hold their collections in the public trust and to educate the public. It is while wearing the education hat that we host meetings, meetings to which we would enjoy having visitors.

While the larger societies which have professionals on staff who see to getting the word out have no need of such a handbook, it may be we can answer a few questions for the town historical society whose newly-elected Secretary wonders where to begin.

The last four [bracketed] appendices listed in the Contents were in the original publication of this handbook. When deciding to post this article on our website, we separated those charts from the article in order to facilitate their occasional updating. You will find the information posted separately on our website (<http://www.historicalsocietiesNH.org>). Members may make additional contributions by writing to lindaday@historicalsocietiesNH.org.

Parenthetically, this handbook explores *press* releases--that is, traditional and periodic forms of print. The world of communication, of course, now includes radio, television, the Internet, and satellite communication, all beyond my ken. If a collaborator with expertise in any of those areas comes forward, we will happily expand the purview of the handbook.

In the meanwhile, here are some tidbits for the adventurous:

- The fifth appendix lists the websites I know of which host community calendars.
- The Laconia Historical Society (NH) has experience in Community Television.
- The Poore Family Farm (Colebrook NH) uses an interesting user-friendly photo distribution following events.
- The Arts Alliance of Northern NH is an outstanding resource for the North Country.
- In addition, the Canterbury Shaker Village, Heritage NH, Mt. Kearsage Indian Museum, Mariposa Museum, and the Remick Country Doctor Museum & Farm are professional museums here in NH which have shown an interest in and willingness to help town historical societies. If you are interested in a particular technology, you may want to contact them to see if they have preceded us into the field. Likewise the State Department of Tourism.

Everyone on the same page
Vocabulary

Under the category of **periodicals** we consider both magazines (with monthly or annual distribution--and with covers) and newspapers (with daily or weekly distribution--without covers).

There are several categories of **advertisement**--to use the term in its most general sense of publicity, of putting the word out.

A press release is a short article written by the host society and submitted to the periodical as the society would like to see it in print. There are no guarantees. However, the periodicals like press releases when they are done correctly and well-written, because there is little work for them--and we do understand the concept of “understaffed”--and because the article qualifies as news, or at least, newsy. There is no charge to the society for the periodical to print a press release.

A news story is generated when the periodical sends one of its staff to call. The staffer/reporter will interview society representatives and may take pictures, before writing the story herself. Usually she will be able to tell you which issue the article will appear in, although that date is not firm because, in the end, it is the editor’s decision (not the reporter’s). News stories are nice for the society because they usually get better placement than press releases, and there is a vitality about them. On the flip side, one is sometimes surprised by inaccuracies. But, there is no charge.

Community news is a hybrid press-release/news-story which may also be referred to as community calendar. It is generally reserved for event announcements and is usually brief. The society calls the reporter who is assigned to the community where the event will take place and gives the specifics. The event may appear as brief as in outline form or it may be written up in a chatty sort of way, depending on the style of the reporter and/or the policy of the periodical: They usually try to put all the communities’ news on a single page. No charge.

Finally, an advertisement, here in the more strict sense of the word, may be the most brief of all because the society pays by the word or by the line per day. The advantage is that the society can say when they want it in the periodical. Although accidents happen, this is the most

sure way have the word out on a particular day if that is important. And, too, if you have the money to spend, advertisements are not under the brevity policy constraints that community news may be, so you can include more details.

Post-release is a variation on “press release,” but is submitted by the society to the periodical after the event. Counter-intuitively, these are particularly valuable for societies striving to increase membership or participation. They are a socially acceptable way of saying “Nyah, nyah,” or, more positively, “We had a good time and we hope you will come next time, to have a good time too!” Include photos; try, over time, to include a variety of local participants, which operates as a strong—though subliminal—advertisement.

Other terms occasionally used in the PR biz (as we like to say):

“Comp the Press” means do not charge admission for members of the press. A good policy for your events. I don’t know if there is an etiquette around this or not, but make a point of *saying*, “Please come as our guest.”

“Court the Press” refers to being nice to them. The expression comes to us from politicians who are tempted not to be, so its implied inverse does not usually apply to us. Still it bears mentioning. In addition to simply contacting the press with news of your events, it is also possible to contact them “for no reason at all,” in order to build a relationship. For example,

- going to meet your contact in person, just to introduce yourself;
- (once you know what the person looks like,) greet the person whenever your paths cross; chat;
- call to thank whenever an article appears about your organization.
- Host a “press tea” or some such thing, for which you invite all your contacts to the historical society, show them around, behind the scenes, have some food, have the Board members present (everyone with name tags), have the Executive Director/President make a presentation on the dreams, goals, 5-year plans, etc, of the society. A volunteer coordinator could ask them if they know, as a result of their wide community contacts, of sources of potential volunteers. (Be careful not to go overboard on asking the press for stuff at such an event. Although relationships with the press naturally evolve to two-way streets, this event should emphasize “getting to know you.”)

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The Panorama of Choices

Even a small society can have a “public relations program,” a plan of action for getting the word out. It can be as simple as having a telephone tree for calling members before the meeting. Or it can run up to courting the press and having pre- and post-releases.

Most town societies will hesitate before putting a great deal of money into advertising, as well they may. There are so many avenues that are free, or cost only time and effort. Unless the event is a money-maker and can off-set the cost of advertising, most agree it is better to use the free avenues. (Do I hear a collective sigh of relief?)

Here is a list of possible facets to a public relations program (Choose the ones that are comfortable for your society/event/purpose):

- telephone tree
- newsletter or other membership mailing
- flyers up around town
- bulk mailing (*i.e.*, to others beyond membership)
- public papers:
 - ✓ press releases, community news before (the event)
 - ✓ advertisements before
 - ✓ press releases after
 - ✓ news stories before
 - ✓ news stories after
- magazines (as for papers)
- e-mail distribution lists
- website announcements (yours & others')
- radio announcements:
 - ✓ releases
 - ✓ news stories
 - ✓ advertisements
- television announcements (as for radio)
- correlated programs, such as a
 - ✓ bookstore promotion,
 - ✓ library program¹, or
 - ✓ live music²
- gimmick advertisement (advertising on things, such as balloons, which are then distributed)

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¹*Humanities To Go!*

²*Arts Alliance of Northern NH*

How-To: The Nitty-Gritty

If you are just beginning, here are a few recommendations.

1. *Have a policy. Let the policy guide your procedure.* The **policy** says what you want to achieve; the **procedure** says how you will do it. For example, the policy may say, We will advertise in the papers before events. The procedure would say, The Secretary will send a press release to Foster's *Daily Democrat* three weeks prior to each event (and, if your programs occur in a pattern, may even indicate the pattern; for example, ...by the second week in April).

We recommend having these two things in writing, even if your society has only 20 members and, of those, perhaps four workers. Inevitably everyone will trade positions. Having something in writing will contribute to a consistent face for the society.

...in writing, but not in stone. To expand the above example, suppose the Secretary, in talking to the people at Foster's, learns they prefer to have press releases by Monday of the week of the event. She would simply line-out "three weeks" in the procedure and write in "Monday prior to." In that way, we can benefit from each other's experience, and not have to start from scratch with each new election.

2. *Start small. Achievable goals.* You can add to your public relations program as your membership grows. You don't want such an intimidating plan that everyone is afraid to take on the responsibility.

3. *Different events may have different announcement procedures.* For example,

- business meetings may be announced through the society's newsletter.
- Speakers may be announced through the newsletter and also by press release.
- Fund-raisers may be announced through the newsletter, by press release and also in radio announcement, and so forth.

As above, tailor the variations to your society and to the level of comfort and/or experience of your public relations person.

4. *Consider having a separate person take responsibility just for public relations.* This person does not have to be the one who actually plans the events. It may be the same, but it does not have to be. In fact, if

you are looking for a long-term commitment, it is better if it is not the same. Planning events has a fairly high burn-out factor, so will tend to turn over. But the planner can simply pass the specifics on to the PR person, which takes some of the burden off the planner.

If you are able to structure that, look for someone who will commit to at least two years in that position. The object is to have the interface between the society and the press become familiar to the press, a contact, a friend (if only in a business sense).

By doing so you lay the groundwork for what is referred to as courting the press.

A nice development that sometimes occurs as the reporter has repeated interactions with you is that she thinks of you. Sometime, when she is stumped for a story, she may call you and ask, "Is anything going on over there I can write about?" Perhaps something is going on, although you didn't think of a press release for it. Maybe someone is doing some research, or you have just had a diary transcribed by a volunteer, or you have been thinking of the volunteer who comes in faithfully on the third Saturday of every month to re-bind your books...suddenly you see your work through the eyes of the reporter, and, ta-daa! News story! Nice development.

Some periodicals like to have a regular feature for which a historical society sends them an old photograph and readers try to identify the people in it--or the place or event or item, as the case may be.¹

After the two-year trial, encourage the person to stay on in that position. People leaving the PR position should actually introduce their successor to the various contacts they have cultivated.

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¹Edith Tucker

Pointers for Writing a Press Release

Building confidence:

A. If you are new to public relations, one way to build your confidence is to “re-do” the work in this manual. That is, call (or visit) the offices of the periodicals you want to target. Introduce yourself, explain who you represent and that you will want to place announcements of events from time-to-time. Ask who your contact should be and what they want you to know about deadlines, formats, and calendar listings. (Take notes and later compare the notes to this manual, jotting down specifics in the margins.)

B. Another way to give yourself confidence is to look at a few back issues of the periodical(s) you intend to target and notice how others structure their press releases.

C. A third way of beginning as your Society’s PR liaison is to begin with community news (see Vocabulary, pg. 4)--which is brief and only requires that you know the facts of the event.

Rolling up your sleeves:

D. If none of the periodicals listed in this manual seems to target your area, check the yellow pages under newspapers, radio, and television, and start your own list¹

¹*Humanities To Go!*

E. Structure of the release:

1. Use white paper; double-space.
2. In the upper left corner write, “For immediate release.”
3. Beneath that, write the date.
4. Beneath the date, write a contact name with phone number and e-mail (if you have one).
5. Do not waste the headline: Make it catchy, but be sure it conveys some information. Write the headline in 18-20 point, in bold.

F. Structure of the content:

1. First paragraph must include *who*, *what*, *where*, and *when*. Must.
2. Keep your first efforts to *three paragraphs*.
Paragraph 1, as above;
Paragraph 2, expand;
Paragraph 3, contact/cost information.
3. The *expansion*: Paragraph 2 should expand on the brief first

paragraph. Who will be interested in attending? Who is presenting? What does the presenter want to have said about the event? Include a quote if possible (writers have been known to make the quotation up). Will there be little extras? Hand-outs? Refreshments? A book-signing afterwards? Include peoples' names--the more local names, the better.¹

4. Last paragraph should include *contact* information, as well as *cost* if there is one.
5. Under no circumstance should a press release be longer than 2 pages.

¹Edith Tucker

G. Time Frame: Publicity should be out 1-2 weeks before the event which usually means the periodicals ought to have something in writing 2-3 weeks before the event.¹ Check deadlines with each periodical you plan to target.

¹*Humanities To Go!*

H. The press often like to have photographs.

1. Check with your contact at the periodical to see if there is a preference for black-and-white over color.
2. Also ask in what form they like to have the picture. They used to want undeveloped film, but computers can scan completed photographs now, making middle steps unnecessary.
3. When taking photographs,

with-people is better than without-people; active is better than passive; close-up is better than distance; simple is better than busy; centered is better than asymmetrical.

4. Buy film that has **few** exposures (10 or 12) in case you want to get it developed before you have finished the roll. Or, of course, use a digital camera. (Not everyone is so lucky.)
5. Incidentally, people who present with any frequency often have photographs they use for press releases. Let the **planner** know it should be part of her process to ask the presenter about that. If there is one, the planner can have the presenter send it directly to you.
6. Find out if the press will send a photographer to the event. If they will, plan a photo session.² Let the presenter know. Perhaps

10 minutes, either before or after the event. In this way the photographer does not have to interrupt the program taking photographs during the presentation. Have a person or two from the audience be included, and give the photographer a piece of paper with everyone's names spelled correctly. Include the name(s) of any books the presenter is author of which are germane to the presentation.

²Edith Tucker

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NOTES

Appendix #1: Allowable suffixes for attachments to the Concord Monitor
Abstracted from a recent e-mail from the Concord Monitor:

As a recently updated security measure, our system only allows a selected list of file-types to enter our network through email attachments.

In order to send an original file, you will have to resave it in a format from our allowable list.

The extension at the end of your file name is how our system determines the file-type and format that it has been saved as. For example:

- A Microsoft Word Document would be called "yourfilename.DOC"

- A graphic that has been saved as a JPEG file would be called "yourfilename.JPG"

We are NOT able to accept:

.sit (Stuffit compressed files) - please compress with ZIP or do not compress at all.

.bmp or **.pcx** - please send these as .PNG or .JPG instead.

html (file or inline) - please send as Microsoft Word or plain text

Also, your transmission will be rejected if you use the "." character when naming the file and there is no extension. Our system will think the remainder of the file name (after the ".") is the extension and will reject it.

Here is a list of our current ALLOWABLE file-types:

.eps	.qxd
.gif	.rtf
.jpeg	.tif
.jpg	.tiff
.pdf	.txt
.png	.vcf
.p65	.xls
.ps	

If you are unsure of what file-type you should select, please contact the party you are sending to for further assistance.