

Knowing how to best approach the media and present your story is essential if you want to get media coverage for your charity. This guide provides top tips and best practice advice on interacting with the media from three different perspectives: the communications trainer, the equality charity and the media.

THE COMMUNICATIONS TRAINER

Ruth Peacock is a freelance journalist and media trainer who works extensively in the charity sector.

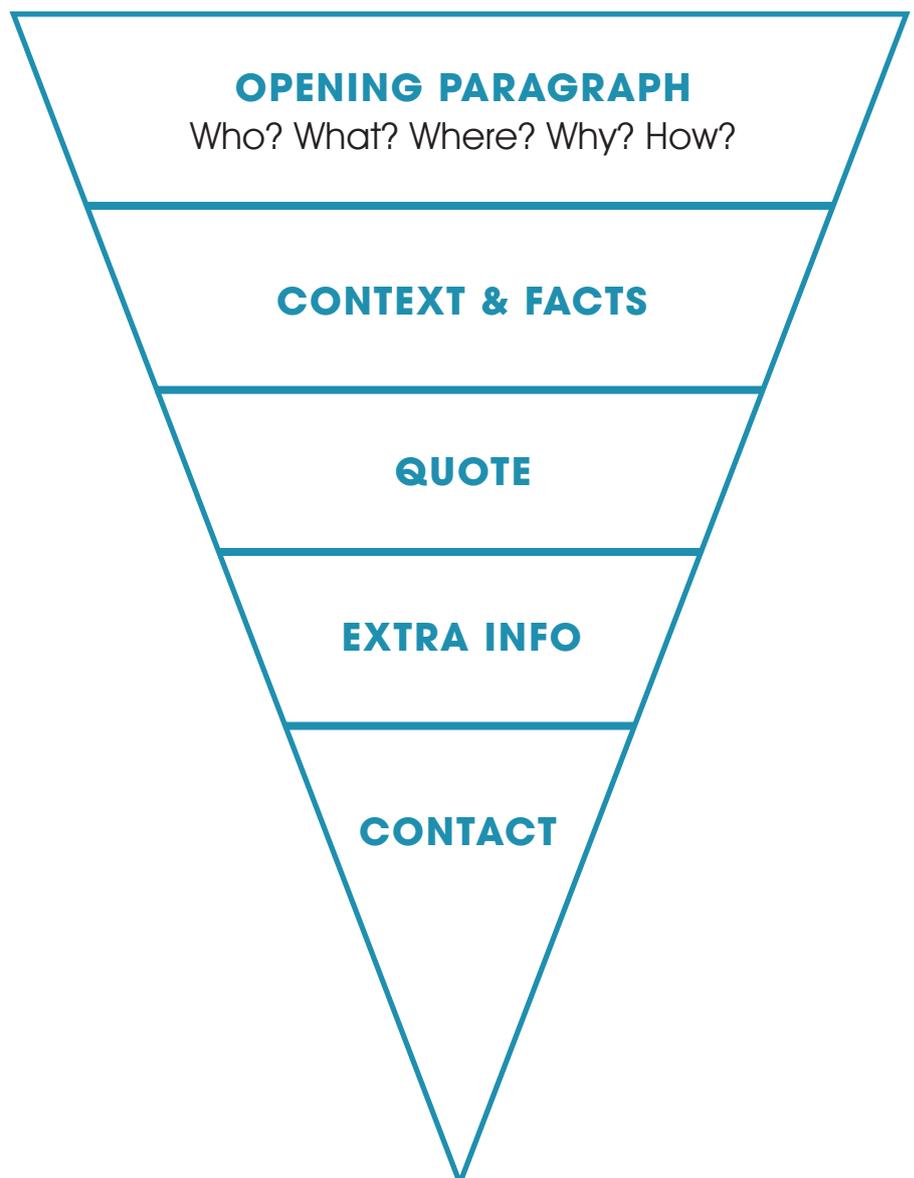
WHAT'S THE STORY?

Your organisation's achievements, business success and beneficiary stories can all be the centrepiece of a good news story. Chat with colleagues to identify your story and make sure you all agree on the key components.

WRITE A PRESS RELEASE

This is a useful first step as it forces you to work out what your top line is, identify your interviewees, gather your facts and figures and be sure you have collected all relevant information.

Think of your press release as a triangle – the most important information goes at the top, the least important at the bottom. Follow a formula to make sure your press release has:



- **When** - Date for publication which could be an embargo or 'for immediate release'.
- **Headline** - what's your story in one sentence? This should go in the subject bar of your email to the journalist.
- **Opening paragraph** - this is the main point of the story in one sentence.
- **Context/facts** - explanation of the top paragraph.
- **Quote** - use short quotes from the person who will be put up for interviews.
- **Case studies** - let the journalist know you have access to case studies.
- **Contacts** - crucial to put a mobile number of the press officer/ main contact.
- **References** - if you quote studies or reports, include links.

Ask the following questions to see if your story might interest journalist:

"Journalists are after good, truthful stories that will engage new and existing audiences."

- **Timely** - is your story relevant to current affairs?
- **Data** - what are the key facts and figures relevant to your organisation's work?

- **Unusual** - what emotive reaction does your story provoke? Surprise, anger or shock?
- **Informative** - what new information can the reader learn from your story?
- **Interesting** - is your story relevant to a wide audience?
- **Controversial** - does your story enter into public debate and hold those in power to account?

"Make life easy for them [journalists] by providing everything in one smooth sweep."

WHO'S TELLING IT?

Every organisation should have a trained spokesperson and for many organisations, this is often the CEO or lead service provider.

However, never forget the power of a beneficiary whose personal story may carry more power in getting your message across. Remember that all beneficiaries should be well prepared, offered support and guidance and any safeguarding issues should be checked.

WHO'S REPORTING IT?

If you have a great story that everyone should know about, try

giving it to an agency like the Press Association which all major media outlets subscribe to.

Always check the media outlets you want to get into so you know the type of story they will be interested in, the name of a reporter who has covered this area before and the kind of material they want – pictures, film opportunities, graphs and interviewees.

Journalists are after good, truthful stories that will engage new and existing audiences. Journalists don't act alone – they have to convince their editor and news desk that the story is worth running. Remember, if they pitch your story to their editor, they're putting their own reputation on the line so make life easy for them by providing everything in one smooth sweep.

If your organisation has not had any contact with the media before, a good first step is to create a contacts list of journalists.

Your list may include national and local media, newspapers and online news platforms, broadcasters and specialist publications. You need their name, role, title of publication, email and phone number as a first step.

"Work hard to stay up to date with occurrences in policy and other current affairs."

THE EQUALITY CHARITY

Daniel Wright is Head of News and Planning at Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF).

KEEP IT CURRENT

At JRF, our mission is to inspire action and change to solve poverty in the UK. My role is to ensure JRF's messages are heard by the right people, in the right places, at the right time. As a team, our objective is to position poverty in the media as a national political priority.

Since 2016 and the Brexit vote, we've had real success in highlighting the situation for people and places on low incomes. In December 2017, [our state of the nation report](#) gained coverage from the Andrew Marr programme, four national newspapers and received widespread TV coverage the following day.

Unsurprisingly, none of this happened overnight. We're a team of three and therefore have to optimise our resource and time. The team and I prioritise three elements to get poverty stories in the media:

1. Tailoring our messages -
We plot our editorial agenda against current affairs to guide us in making strategic choices about how we talk about poverty. With talk of burning injustices being a current hot topic of



discussion, we ensure our stories about employment, housing and social security speak to current political issues. We also carefully frame how we talk about poverty so our messages resonate with the public - I'll touch on this in more detail later on.

2. Meticulous planning -

We run a news grid system to plot in our stories and identify reactive opportunities. Working with this level of time precision enables us to place stories that both respond to current events and resonate with readers' experiences of poverty. For example, we might push out content on what the monthly inflation figures mean for a low-income family's stretched finances.

3. An engagement programme with journalists - We've worked

hard at building our links with journalists, particularly at the BBC, but also outside of our comfort zone via meetings with economic, political and social affairs journalists.

We love seeing JRF's work hit the headlines but ultimately, if there is no action following the media coverage, then both the coverage and our efforts to obtain it lack long-term impact.

“Position poverty in the media as a national political priority.”

The three of us work hard to stay up to date with occurrences in policy and other current affairs. As a team, we scan the papers and have a daily catch up before 9:00am – usually on Whatsapp just for quickness and ease, in which we share links and agree actions for the day. Actions could be a social media response, commissioning a blog or issuing a comment. Working this way means we keep up with the news agenda, and most importantly, show journalists we have relevant comments and opinions on the issues of the day.



Here at JRF, we focus on getting the right piece of coverage over volume. We provide journalists with packages of content, not just single stories: this means analysis, policy recommendations, videos and graphics journalists can embed online, and where possible, real people willing to speak.

“We provide journalists with packages of content, not just single stories.”

What really helps us at JRF is having good links with counterparts in the communications teams of supposed ‘rival’ organisations. That way we’re sharing stories under embargo and can co-ordinate supportive comments and social media content. Ultimately, if we all want to put an end to poverty then it’s in our best interests to push forward and work together.

We provide a lot of support when working with people with lived experience of poverty, and only put them in touch with known and trustworthy journalists. This can be incredibly challenging, especially at short notice, but it’s worth it. Live case studies are what can make your story stand out from the others. Similar to many charities, we’re up against some powerful and hateful narratives and the types of people we approach to be live case studies are often victims of harmful stereotypes.



Fortunately, using the framing techniques covered in the *Communications for Change* Stronger Voices guide, JRF have changed the language we use to trigger the public’s sense



“We stress possible solutions in our messaging as a means to overcome fatalism in the public’s mind.”

of justice and compassion to improve public understanding of poverty. Furthermore, Abigail Scott Paul, our deputy director of advocacy and public engagement, has been involved in ground breaking research alongside the Frameworks Institute on how the public understand poverty and the team now uses this insight to shape how we communicate.

Finally, we stress possible solutions in our messaging as a means to overcome fatalism in the public’s mind. Everything is a crisis at the minute, so I’d urge any charity to think carefully about what solution they’re proposing to show that progress is possible.

Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) is an independent social change organisation working to solve UK poverty. Through research, policy, collaboration and practical solutions, JRF aims to inspire action and change that will create a prosperous UK in which poverty no longer exists.

THE MEDIA AGENCY

Ian MacGregor, Editor Emeritus at The Telegraph, offers his ten tips for ensuring that your story strikes journalists' fancy.

MAKE IT EASY, MAKE IT JAZZY.



Here's the good news - the media needs great stories.

Here's the bad news, it isn't always easy getting your content published.

This is a short, practical guide of ten key points to help you get your stories noticed by journalists working in print, online, TV or radio.

1. WHAT are you offering?

Is it really a news story, or is it more of a feature, or case study? Or maybe even a comment article?

2. WHO are you targeting?

Be precise about the audience you want to reach, as this will influence both the news outlet

and medium. Make sure the material is relevant to readers.

3. If you're pitching a news story, has it got a clear ANGLE or point? If not, it won't get very far.

4. Is your story something that people will actually TALK ABOUT in a cafe / pub / office / home? If it isn't something that people are interested in then it simply won't make the cut.

5. FACTS. Ensure you have them and back up your story with the right details and statistics.

6. QUOTES. Clear, strong quotes that capture the essence of your story are invaluable.

7. CONTACTS. Find out who are the best people in each

news organisation to reach out to. If you are a charity it might be the social affairs or home affairs specialist, and if they don't exist try the news editor. Always get the name of the person you are writing to.

8. Think PICTURES and VIDEO. All stories benefit from illustrations in paper and online. Make it easier for journalists by providing great visuals.

9. Get the DELIVERY right. Lay all the information out on one page with contact numbers and send this all along to the news organisation with plenty of time.

10. DON'T GIVE UP. Stories can slip through the net, so if you are sure you have a great idea keep on contacting the right people.



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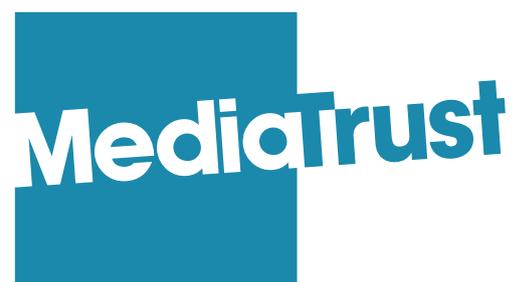


In Partnership With:



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