



Working with the media

Hints and tips

Why approach the media?
How to write a press release
How to set up a press conference
How to run a press campaign
and more...

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Foreword

This guide is an EAPN's document, updated and adapted for the use of all its members.

This guide offers a number of Hints and tips to improve **how you work with the media at national and even local level**. It is designed chiefly to be a **practical toolkit for national networks and their member organisations**.

The European Union is made up of 27 Member States with a wide range of different cultures, so (good) press relations practice can differ widely in terms of, for example, how to write a press release, or how you approach the media (formal invitations, channels used, style of press conference, etc). What this handbook will try and do, however, is to **suggest a few "good sense" practices**, although that will never replace the experience developed in the field by the good old "trial and error" technique.

Point 1 mentions the reaching out of different target groups through the media.

1. Why approach the media?

As well as developing a public awareness strategy through more direct actions (mailshots, demonstrations, poster campaigns, petitions, etc), each EAPN member and EAPN as a whole has everything to gain from raising **its profile and extending the reach of its action through the media** - general or special-interest - as a “channel” between itself and the public.

The idea behind media relations is to address the following aims:

- To boost EAPN’s **visibility** at **European, national, regional and local level**, e.g., to tap into support from the public.
- To create a climate that will help **deliver our aims**, notably by making different target groups (general public, special-interest groups, political circles, etc) aware of the cause of fighting poverty and social exclusion.

While press relations are not a marketing ploy, their main aim is clearly to **work for and raise visibility and awareness on EAPN and its objectives**. In the final analysis, they are really about creating or managing an image to win **support** for the policy positions worked out by EAPN.

2. Who should we target?

Simply putting information out “into the wild” without knowing whom it will reach is a bit like throwing a message in a bottle out to sea: there is not much likelihood of it getting read, still less published. So before trying to work with the media, you must be clear about the **media environment** your network/organisation is operating in.

Identify what’s out there

Before moving on to the stages described below which will lead you on to draw up your own list of journalists, check with your member or partner organizations to see whether they have already drawn up their own lists at the area level where your network/organisation operates. Ask to be sent copies of their lists so as to save time and act as inspiration.

It is useful to call journalists once a year to make sure your list is updated and have a direct contact with them.

Find out about the “traditional” media

The following checklist can help you to do this:

Checklist

Print media (general or specialised):

1. Get hold of newspapers and magazines for the country or area where you operate; not just ones that you buy, but also the free papers distributed in public transport or through letter-boxes.
2. Scan through them, trying to identify the issues they cover (especially social issues, and - better still - issues around poverty and social exclusion), whether they have a Letters to the Editor page, whether they use a lot of photographs, etc. Note whether they publish opinion articles or announcements of activities in your country or area. Find out when they go to press.
3. Note down the names of journalists who cover social issues (poverty, employment, social protection, anti-discrimination, social inclusion, etc), or, at any rate who might be likely to give a mention to your activities or information. Try and get into contact with them or their editors in chief, and find out their contact details.

Radio/television:

1. Listen to radio and watch TV programmes for your country or local area. These programmes will obviously have a target audience, which may not include you. But if you aim to build a broad public awareness, there is no good reason for restricting it to a single group.
2. Try to identify the radio or television programmes (mainly factual) that are likely to broadcast your information or which you might be invited to take part in, perhaps even occupy a regular slot (which will not be so easy,..) or that you can phone into or email.
3. Note down the names of the journalists responsible for these broadcasts. Try and get into contact with them and find out their contact details.

News agencies:

1. Look in the telephone directory or do an Internet search for news agencies operating in your country or area.
2. Try and get into contact with them and find out the contact details of journalists that cover social issues and/or activities in your area. Find out whether there are correspondents at your area level.

The “new media” and other information producers

All “traditional” media have developed **websites where they publish not only the information reported in their print or broadcast versions, but also a range of site-specific sections and information**. As well as these on-line versions of existing media, other new media outlets have developed that are only on the Internet. Most of these offer written information, but some also webcast filmed interviews or reports. **Do not ignore these**, as they are growing in number and getting more accessible (in particular through themed package subscription schemes).

But the “traditional” and “new” media nowhere near account for all the information that goes out to the public. Many people subscribe to **newspapers or magazines produced by trade unions, health maintenance organizations, a wide range of voluntary organizations** (dealing with the family, education, human rights, etc), research bodies, public bodies, etc. Some of these organisations in some countries have access to and may even produce radio or television programmes.

Do not discount these media either, as they often reach many more people than you might at first think.

Checklist

Web media:

1. Do an Internet search (via web search engines like Google) using key words like “online news”, “news agency”, “information”, “poverty”, etc. Or click on relevant links that will take you to the online media operating in your country or area (if there are any).
2. Look for the contact details (normally an email address) of the media’s editorial staff.

Other media outlets:

(trade union, health maintenance organization, voluntary organization and other press)
Follow the same procedure as for the print and - if relevant - radio/television media.

Create a directory

At the end of this, you should have a lot of useful contact details.

Checklist

1. Create an “Excel”-type spreadsheet file with multiple columns: Name of media outlet/name of journalist(s)/full address/phone-fax-email. Classify media by type and possibly by frequency of publication (daily, weekly, fortnightly, monthly, quarterly, etc).
2. In your email program, create one or more groups of journalists and update it/them regularly.
3. Create an address book from your directory that you can consult at any time, wherever you are.
4. Store the most useful phone numbers in your landline phone or mobile memory.

With some e-mailers, you can also manage your directory from within the program. Whatever else, make regular backup copies and keep a printed version of them.

The proximity rule!

The information that you pitch to the press has the best chance of getting published if it relates to activities happening in or news about the area covered by the media outlet. The further away from the media outlet’s area the event or information is, the less interest it will have for it. This so-called “proximity rule” holds good at all levels of the press - regional, national and European.

Example: you will almost never get a press release on the Lisbon Strategy published in a local media outlet. You are always better advised to point to the national, regional or local consequences of a European decision, such as choices made under the employment policies (e.g., drastic cut-backs in early retirement schemes).

3. Do we need a Press Officer?

It is a good idea to nominate an individual - volunteer or salaried staff - within each network to be in charge of contacts with the press. Their main job will be to see that the network's activities and policies get reported in the press. It is important to have this done by a single individual at each level (national, regional and local), at least for the duration of an action or press campaign, if it is not feasible for longer periods. It lets the media know exactly who to contact.

Who should it be?

One of the most essential things for a media relations officer is to be easily contactable during daytime, and even in the evening. Most journalists write their articles or do their radio or television reports during the day, although they may wish to meet in the evening.

The press relations officer must have access to suitable means of communication, like a telephone, email, Internet access and possibly, a fax. They must also be able to listen and communicate clearly. Training in journalism and communication, and experience in public speaking, are obvious plusses.

Credibility and consistency

The press officer must have **credibility**, which is mainly earned by whether the media have confidence in the **intellectual and moral integrity of their information source**. In other words, the press officer must see him/herself as duty-bound never to put other considerations above the truth, not be "economical with the truth", and not disclose information - even true - which is confidential or may be damaging to the organisation. Press officers must also respect their contact's freedom of opinion and not try to pressurise them.

The idea, therefore, is to give **objective information, not "hype"**, as advertising or propaganda might do. The other side of this is that they are entitled to **expect that journalists will act strictly objectively and ethically**. In the best of worlds, press relations should be personalised, person to person, rather than organisation-to-media. Also, a press officer who comes across as a "spin doctor" for the organisation risks forfeiting credibility.

Consistency means the press officer telling the same story to all media outlets, so it is better not to feed information to one particular journalist first. Also, the messages put across by the press officer must be consistent with those of the organisation itself.

4. How to write a press release

Journalists' time is valuable. So the best way to put out factual, objective information that you want to make known is through a press release. Political diatribes tend not to get published. And your aim is to reach the public through the media, not throw out "messages in bottles" (see point 2).

What is a press release for?

- Giving general information on your network or organisation (launch, review, etc);
- For members of EAPN, passing on information (and adapting it) contained in a press release issued at EU level (if relevant);
- Putting out a stance on a political issue;
- Announcing an event that you have arranged;
- Introducing the report on an activity or conference;
- Announcing a new action, or giving an update on an ongoing action;
- and so on

What should a press release be like?

A press release should:

- **Be brief and to the point:** not more than two A4 pages in length - and preferably one -, written in newspaper style: short sentences, vocabulary appropriate to the target readers, avoid jargon, plenty of space in the layout.
- **Be written as if you were the journalist:** the idea of a press release is that it can be published almost as written, without sub-editing. So it must be well-written and **properly spell-checked**.
- **Not be a political diatribe:** it must focus on facts and case-building.
- **Be rewritten if it comes from a translation:** if the original of the press release is not written in your national language, you should "rewrite" it rather than go with a literal translation. Content is what matters, not form.
- Include at least the six Ws:
 1. **WHAT** is happening?
 2. **WHO** is doing it?
 3. **WHERE** is it happening?
 4. **WHEN** is it happening?
 5. **WHY** is it happening?
 6. **WHOM** does it concern?

Example: EAPN (who) unveiled a report (what) this morning (when) in Brussels (where) setting out the necessity of strengthening Social Inclusion in the post-2010 European Strategy (why) among public opinion and the authorities (whom).

Checklist

1. Use the network or organisation's headed notepaper, or better still, the standard layout created specifically for press releases, containing at least the network/organisation's name, full address, phone/fax/email details.
2. Put the words "Press release" at the top, with date and place of issue.
3. Specify whether the press release is "for immediate publication" or embargoed, i.e., not to be published before a specific date and time.
4. Use a short, attention-grabbing title that gives the main point, and is not confusing. Clichés can be eye-catching, but try not to overdo them.
5. You can preface the main body with an introductory paragraph in bold and/or italic, which summarises the main point. In reality, this introductory paragraph (along with the title) should be enough on its own: it should give the reader the gist of what is contained in the rest of the press release.
6. The rest of the text should make the general case, containing details, tables, etc. Avoid using the first person singular or plural ("I", "We"); instead use your network/organisation's name. E.g.: "EAPN has just published a report", rather than "We have just published a report". If you want to comment, attribute the words to a spokesperson or someone who supports your case (**quotes**).
7. Make it clear where the press release ends with the words "press release ends".
8. Remember to include the contact details of the person from whom further information can be obtained, in a prominent place at the beginning or end of the press release (according to standard practice).

Sending the press release

Post, fax and/or email the press release to the journalists whom you want to reach (see above about creating a directory of journalists), or hand it out at a press conference or an event (see below). You can also accompany the press release with a fuller document that you have referred to in the press release (e.g., a report, policy paper, statistics, etc). Sending out a press release is not the end of it: **following it up** (by phone or email) is often a good idea to make sure that it has got to the main media outlets that you are targeting, and to check whether they plan to publish it. Caution: do not push to try and get it published at all costs; bear in mind that you are suggesting, but the journalist has the final say...

Checklist

1. If emailing your press release, it's best to put it in the body text of your email message so the journalist does not have to perform an additional operation by opening or saving a file attachment. It also makes it quicker to send... and receive. But you could always do both: put the text of the press release in the message body, **and** attach a file. If you send it to press agencies, it is worth to add keywords at the beginning.
2. Don't forget to send your press release to your members as well, so that they can answer questions if contacted by the media.
3. If your information doesn't get used, you can always contact the journalist to find out why so that you can get it right next time. That will let you gauge how sympathetic the journalist feels towards your network or organisation, and the causes you are championing.
4. If phoning, remember to note down the names and direct lines of the people you are talking to.

5. How to set up a press conference

A press conference is a meeting to which you invite the press in order to give them important information that you want published/broadcast. **The topic must be worth the journalists taking the trouble to attend.** It must be properly prepared if your network/organisation is to be taken seriously.

Preparing the press conference

Checklist

1. Define precisely the topic of the press conference and identify the speakers.
2. Set the date for when you want it, but try not to hold it on the same day or in the same period as any other press conferences or events that you know about which might attract the journalists you are targeting. Also, make allowances for holiday periods and public holidays, and journalists' non-working days.
3. Set it for a time relevant to the media outlets you are inviting: the best time is late morning for the printed press (after editorial meetings), but not too late for lunchtime radio and TV news bulletins.
4. Choose a venue that is easy to get to and has parking space. The room must be suited to a press conference (not too big, facilities for note-taking, nobody wandering in unannounced, PA system if need be).
5. Arrange for a quiet room for post-conference interviews.
6. Optionally - arrange to have your own photographer present.

Invitations to the press

Invitations to attend a press conference should follow most of the rules for the press release: keep them brief, clear, and always use the 6 Ws - WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHY, WHOM.

Checklist

1. Write your invitation like a press release, but head it "Invitation to a press conference" or use some other phrase that distinguishes it from an actual press release.
2. State clearly why the conference is being called: it must be a good enough reason to make journalists come along. Also, include the names and titles of the speakers.
3. Include a reply slip, or at least make it clear that you would like the journalists to send a reply (by email, for example). Ask whether they would like to interview any particular speaker after the press conference.
4. Invitations to press conferences should be personalised if possible, and reach journalists sufficiently in advance - at least two weeks ahead of time. This means taking account of media outlets' **publication deadlines**, to enable them to plan their content ahead of time

for publication date.

5. A few days before the conference, give a gentle reminder by phoning in person (preferably) or emailing journalists who have not replied but whom you really want to attend.

The press kit

The press kit consists of a set of documents that are handed to journalists attending an event, like a press conference, for example, or sent on afterwards. What goes into it depends on the event itself and the subject addressed. Most commonly, it will include:

- An introductory press release, which includes the contact details of the person to be contacted for more information;
- The network/organisation's presentation brochure;
- Relevant documentation (reports, figures, reviews, etc.).

Put the documents in a folder that has the network/organisation's logo and other useful information (contact details, mission statement, etc.) on the front. If your budget can't stretch to this, use clear plastic display binder pockets.

Conducting the press conference

Checklist

1. Make sure that your network/organisation can be easily identified but putting a banner or any other material (with your logo) at the most visible place, usually behind the speakers.
2. Make sure that the press relations officer or "meeter and greeter" stands at the entrance to the room to welcome and inform journalists.
3. Draw up an attendance sheet with at least three columns: name of media outlet, name of journalist attending, journalist's contact details. Place it at the entrance to the room and make sure that everyone fills it in. You can fill in beforehand the names of journalists who have confirmed their attendance and simply ask them to tick their name (or do it yourself).
4. Give the press kit to journalists as soon as they sign in, and, at any rate, before the speeches start.
5. Limit the number and time of speeches (not more than 30 minutes in total for all speeches), to allow journalists time for questions. Information aids are a help. Speakers should not just read out their prepared statements; the information given must be more complete and nuanced than that in a press release.
6. Allow time for a fairly lengthy question-and-answer session, and brief the speakers ahead of time so that they are prepared for all questions, even off-topic and annoying ones. Drafting a 'Frequently Asked Questions and Answers' beforehand can be useful for your representatives.
7. Plan for a less formal time slot after the conference to allow more personalised contacts between speakers and journalists.
8. If journalists ask (especially radio and TV press), arrange interviews with speakers in the room set aside for the purpose.

Following up on the conference

As well as evaluating its success in terms of attendance, quality of organisation and speeches, you should also follow-up on the press conference.

Checklist

1. Send the press kit to journalists whom you were counting on to attend, but who did not turn up. If no press photographer was present, send out photographs taken by your own photographer.
2. Keep press cuttings and record TV/radio broadcasts (or webcasts) to evaluate the press coverage and keep a record of your conference.
3. If you find that the information has been misinterpreted or distorted, you should notify the journalist of the error or omission. You are clearly not questioning his freedom to write what he wants, but just putting the record straight. An example might be where a journalist reports that EAPN estimates that there are 84 million people living in poverty in the EU-27, when what was actually said was 74 million.

6. How to run a press campaign

If your press activity forms part of a broader action or campaign, you should develop a specific media strategy, i.e., an overall approach to the work to be done. A timetable can help you here.

Checklist

1. Analyse the aims and scale of the action or campaign, the types of action planned (letters to the authorities, partnerships, demonstrations, etc.).
2. Define the targets: general interest press, special-interest and/or voluntary community press, etc.
3. Draw up a schedule (sending out press releases, organising a press conference, covering a public event, etc.) that makes allowance for the publication frequency and deadlines of the targeted media.
4. Identify the material you will need (press releases, leaflets, posters, reports, etc.).
5. Identify the people who could help you in-house or who could support your press relations work (potential speakers, prominent politicians, celebrities, etc.)

At a public event

Your press campaign can use all the means we have just looked at. But we have not yet looked at public events. If undertaking an activity like this, make sure that the press liaison officer (or whoever is doing that job) is present and known to the participants. There is nothing worse for a journalist than being “shunted from pillar to post”. In this way, a journalist who comes to cover your public event will be steered directly to the person who can best explain what is going on. That person will also be in charge of making it easier for any photographers and camera operators present to do their job.

Checklist

1. Draw up a written summary for in case you are interviewed by the press.
2. Take several copies of the original press release along with you.
3. If possible, produce a press release on the event itself, to be handed out at the time or sent out after the event, describing what happened and the outcomes in terms of numbers present and any notable occurrences.
4. Warn photographers ahead of time of when the best photo opportunity will occur. There is no point in keeping photographers hanging around all throughout the event.
5. Have your own photographer to keep a record of the event; you can use these photographs (if good quality) for your own publications or website. Also, if any media outlets that were not there ask you for photographs, you will be able to supply them. There is no point in making videos for press use unless you have high-specification professional equipment.

7. Personal meetings

Journalists themselves will often request a personal meeting. The press officer then acts as a channel between the journalist and the most appropriate person. The most usual form of meeting is an interview.

Checklist

1. Prepare the interview carefully by going over the subject(s) that will be covered.
2. Bear in mind during the interview that the journalist is still collecting information even when chatting less formally. There is usually no such thing as “off the record” comments: if the interview is being taped and the journalist turns off the recorder, it does not mean the interview is over!
3. For the printed press, see if you can get to read through the article before it is published, making it clear that it is just to check the facts. NB: journalists are (rightly) quite sensitive about this kind of thing; only ask this if the interview has gone well and there is no evident reason why you should not be able to look through the article first.

An afterword

This series of checklists is not “everything you need to know about the media”. Your network or organisation has many other possible ways of communicating with the media: press briefings, personal contacts, press breakfasts, invitations to cultural events, press visits, specific training sessions, etc. **Be enterprising!** There is no substitute for experience. If you have never done any work with the press, have a go, now; you have nothing to lose, and everything to gain!