
Press Releases/Advisories: How to, Samples, and Activity

ACTIVITY AT A GLANCE...

Objectives: To teach students to draft media materials while developing critical thinking and writing skills

Time: One to 1½ hours

Space: Any space that fits your group and where you can divide into 2-3 small groups

Materials: The student handout, including samples

Instructions

Step 1:

With your students, review the student handout and samples that follow. Compare and contrast the sample advisory and release, noting the very different types of information included in each.

Step 2:

Divide into small groups to draft a media advisory about an either real or made-up event. Using a computer, or writing by hand, have the students draft the documents. Review them as a group. Then discuss how you would get such announcements distributed to the press.

Optional

As a take-home project, you can also ask youth to draft a full-blown media release, which typically requires more time to write than advisories.

Press Releases/Advisories: How to, Samples, and Activity

This handout focuses on two common types of media outreach: press advisories and press releases.

Press advisories announce *upcoming* events. They are usually very short. Use them to:

- Get announcements printed telling people about your event
- Get press coverage of your event while it happens

Press releases describe what *already happened* OR gets out new information or data. They are longer and more detailed than advisories. Two examples when you might use a press release include:

- If you hope to get an article written about the previous night's community event
- If you want to promote new information, such as the results of a survey or focus group

Tips for Writing Press Advisories or Releases

When writing an advisory or a release, you need to remember a few things:

- Write a clear headline using strong verbs: "Local Youth Mobilize Their Communities for Change" or "Middle School Students Want More Bike Lanes, Survey Finds."
- Put your most important information in the first paragraph. Your "lead" or opening sentence is the most important sentence in the document. Again, use strong verbs.
- Keep advisories to one page; press releases can be longer.
- Use the body to make your key points. Keep paragraphs short.
- Always include a contact name and number so the reporter can get more information.
- Be prepared to give follow-up interviews for any media release you issue.
- **Important:** Write your materials with the media in mind; consider how they would use your information. For example, a St. Louis newspaper would *not* likely write an article about 30 teens from across the country attending a national conference. However, the paper *might* write a feature about a St. Louis teen who was elected to represent his school at that conference.

Media Distribution Lists

Once you write your media advisories or releases, you have to get them in the hands of reporters and editors. Ideally you would borrow an existing media list from a local PR firm or other organization. If you must compile your own, look up your local newspapers, network television stations, and major radio stations. Address your materials to the “Assignment Desk” as well as the metro or education beat reporters in your area. If your material is at all timely, fax it. After you send your information, follow up by phone. You have a much better chance of getting coverage if you actually speak with the reporter. (You can also send materials to community organizations that print newsletters or to school newspapers.)

Note: The California Center has media lists on file for several major markets in California. We are happy to share!

Training Activity: Draft Media Materials

Using the samples on the following pages, divide into small groups to draft a media advisory. Write about either a real or made-up event. Using a computer, or writing by hand, draft the documents. Review them as a group. Then discuss how you would get such announcements distributed to the press.

The following sample media materials depict a fictitious conference and public forum. Note that the **advisory** is short and focused on announcing an event. By contrast, the **release** contains more content and reads more like an article.

Press Advisory

January 2, 2003

Contact: Bob Jones: (123) 222-2345 or jones@demo.org

Citizens Invited to Teen-Led Public Forum on Community Growth

Viewpoints Presented at Forum to Be Later Shared at National Conference

Anytown, MT – Two Jefferson High School Students were selected from applicants nationwide to be Youth Delegates to the *Champions for Healthy Communities Conference* in Washington, DC next month – a convening of national, state, and local leaders in community design. The teens, Jane Doe and John Smith, invite Anytown residents to share their opinions on community growth during a pre-conference forum to be held January 10 at the Youth Community Center. The forum will enable Doe and Smith – whose participation in the Youth Delegation requires them to speak on behalf of Anytown – to accurately represent the perspectives of their community.

Mayor Joe Garcia, as well as members of the Anytown Planning Commission, will attend the forum.

What: Citizen Forum on community growth. Topics to be addressed include public transit, traffic congestion, and sprawl.

Who: Jefferson High School teens to lead the forum. Mayor Garcia, local commissioners, and Anytown residents to attend.

When: Tuesday, January 10, 7:00-8:30 p.m.

Where: Youth Community Center, 123 Main Street, Anytown, MT

Seating is limited so please RSVP by contacting Bob Jones at (123) 222-2345 or jones@demo.org.

Doe and Smith's participation in the Youth Delegation is sponsored by the National Center for Democracy Education with funding from the Grantmaking Grant Foundation.

Press Release

January 11, 2003

Contact: Bob Jones: (123) 222-2345 or jones@demo.org

Over 100 Citizens Speak Up at Teen-Led Public Forum on Community Growth

Their Views to Be Presented Next Month at National Conference

Anytown, MT – Jefferson High School students Jane Doe and John Smith were thrilled by the turnout of more than 100 teens and adults at their Public Forum on Community Growth last night at the Youth Community Center. Citizens called for reliable and accessible public transportation, pedestrian-friendly streets, and mixed-use neighborhoods that combat sprawl and conserve Anytown’s historic districts.

Doe and Smith, who will be Youth Delegates to a national policy conference next month, organized the forum in order to learn more about their community members’ views. The teens wanted to accurately represent their town at the conference. This modest goal turned into a powerful vehicle for community members to speak out about their desires for Anytown’s future.

“We were blown away by the number of people who came out!” said 17-year-old Jane Doe. “We had no idea our neighbors cared so much about preserving Anytown’s heritage and environment.”

The youth – who moderated the discussion in a talk show style with cordless microphones – will share their community members’ perspectives next month at the *Champions for Healthy Communities Conference* in Washington, DC. The event will be attended by more than 600 experts and policymakers in community planning.

While local residents are pleased their views will be shared at this national setting, many Anytown citizens think the most important outcome may have been the forum itself. Mayor Joe Garcia is among them.

“Anytown needs more events like these,” said the mayor. “Our town’s population is on the rise, and we need to make sure the public participates in planning our growth. Last night’s forum made it clear that we also need to make sure youth are a part of the process, since they clearly have a stake in the future of their community.”

For additional information, or for a video tape of the Public Forum, contact Bob Jones at (123) 222-2345 or jones@demo.org.

Doe and Smith’s participation in the Youth Delegation is sponsored by the National Center for Democracy Education with funding from the Grantmaking Grant Foundation.