

**NEON**

# **PRESS OFFICER HANDBOOK**

A guide to progressive  
media work

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The authors take full responsibility for any errors and mistakes in this publication. We would, however, like to thank those who have helped us so much with making this happen - without them it would have been far worse! We couldn't have done it without:

Florri Burton  
Dan Jones  
Sarah Barfield Marks  
Kevin Smith  
Rosie Baines

We would also like to thank the many communications professionals who have guided us over the years through what can be a very difficult job. Among the many helping hands are Penny Kemp, Carys Afoko, Ian Wingrove, Archie Thomas, Caroline Lucas MP, Alice Bell, Kirsty Major, Luke Massey, Sofie Jenkinson, Clifford Singer, Christine Berry, Sophie Armour, Georgia Elander, Joanna Kindeberg, Joe Todd, Matt Zarb Cousin, Adam Ramsay, Ellie Mae O'Hagan and the whole NEON Press Officer Network who have been instrumental in making this happen. A special thanks to Joe Williams who on one of the worst days said one of the best things possible: 'tomorrow's chip paper, mate'.

Finally thanks to the many journalists who we have worked with, who have forgiven us for our ignorance and helped us improve. We owe you a lot.

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# **INTRODUCTION**

*Press Officer: a person whose job is to give a person or organization advice on what to say to newspapers, or on television, etc., and who gives information about a person or organisation to newspapers, etc.<sup>1</sup>*

Being a press officer means different things to different people, but at its most basic it's your job to help your cause or organisation communicate what you are doing for the world. You might be part of a communications team, or the only press officer in your organisation - or maybe you aren't even being paid to do the press work. Whatever your exact role, you are reading this guide because you want to better understand how to get media coverage for a cause you care about.

It's not always easy doing press work. On one side there are colleagues and allies desperate for coverage of the issues you are working on, and on the other side are overworked journalists receiving pitches hundreds of times a day from people just like you. You're often the bearer of bad news ('They aren't interested in the story' / 'We don't have anyone available at that time'). You won't always be thanked when things go well, but you'll likely get the blame if things go wrong. And when things go wrong, they can go very wrong.

On the plus side, what you do really matters. When you get coverage, you don't just raise public consciousness, you might inspire people to take political action, donate their money or change their behaviour. Without your work there's a good chance that no one outside of a very small bubble would ever hear about the work being done by your organisation. You are the microphone of the movement.

## **WHAT MAKES A GOOD PRESS OFFICER**

### **1 - BE TRUSTWORTHY AND ACCURATE.**

*This might seem obvious, but in moments of panic sometimes press officers can be prone to exaggeration and overplaying their hand. Don't ever give a journalist the wrong information - your reputation depends on being reliable. If a journalist prints false information because of you, never expect them to pick up your calls again.*

### **2 - BE QUICK AND AVAILABLE**

*When your phone rings, pick it up. Being a press officer is not a 9-5 job because journalists work all hours of the day. Sometimes the big break will come at 10pm on a Friday night as the Today Programme desperately hunt for a last minute guest - or at 7am as a story breaks. Be as ready as possible.*

### **3 - WRITE WELL OR WORK WITH PEOPLE WHO CAN**

*Good writing is crucial. Whether it's writing clear and concise press releases, drafting hard-hitting quotes or ghost writing comment pieces, you need to be able to turn around excellent prose in a matter of minutes.*

### **4 - UNDERSTAND WHAT MAKES A GOOD STORY**

*Step into the shoes of a journalist and think about what kind of story their editor will want to hear about. This isn't just about what's important to you, it's about what is actually newsworthy (and those things are rarely the same). Before ringing that journalist to pitch a story you should read their last five pieces - what kind of things are they interested in?*

### **5 - BE HELPFUL, EVEN IF IT DOESN'T MEAN GETTING PRESS COVERAGE FOR YOUR WORK**

*If you want to be the kind of person a journalist calls, then be helpful to them whenever you can. That might mean sending them useful information even if you won't get a mention in a story. Or it might mean passing them onto other organisations who will be more helpful or relevant than you. Wherever possible, don't say 'no' to requests - help the journalist find someone who can say 'yes'.*

### **6 - KNOW HOW NEWS ORGANISATIONS WORK**

*Before pitching a story it's worth finding out about the news outlet you're speaking to. What time is the editorial meeting? Who is responsible for the topic you're pitching about? How far in advance should you be contacting them? Don't be afraid to ring the newsdesk and ask them these questions.*

## 7 - UNDERSTAND JOURNALISTS

*You think your job is hard? Try being a journalist. They are often badly paid, extremely busy and subject to the outbursts of editors working against impossible deadlines. Most journalists don't have a political ideology that they are pushing, they just want to get good stories. Also remember that junior journalists don't write the headlines or the editorials. So, be kind to them when you can.*

## 8 - MAINTAIN YOUR CALM, EVEN UNDER EXTREME PRESSURE

*A good day in the office means your phone ringing constantly, it means email after email in your inbox and running from TV studio to radio van. The worst thing you can do when the heat is on is panic. The best way to avoid a meltdown is to ask for help when you need it, be realistic with what you can deliver and have systems in place to ensure you can stay on top of requests.*

## 9 - BE A MASTER OF SOCIAL MEDIA

*Fifteen years ago you didn't need to worry about this, but now you do. Journalists look for news on social media, so being a good press officer means mastering it. That doesn't just mean sending funny tweets, it means using social channels to spot relevant breaking news early, and then crafting lines and using video to respond in a way which alerts journalists to what you're saying.*

## 10 - DON'T BE AFRAID OF THE PHONE

***The most common fear of press officers? The telephone.***

*If you're the kind of person who hates ringing people you don't know, then you need to train yourself to do it. The first step is to write down a 30 second pitch that you can read out when you call a journalist. Preempt questions they might ask and find the answers before you call. Do this a few times and suddenly you'll realise that the phone isn't that scary after all.*

## WHAT IS FRAMING AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

A common mistake communicators make is to imagine the human mind as a blank slate. We assume that if we craft a captivating message and repeat it over and over, eventually people will begin to listen.

Actually, the human mind is more like a swamp. It's filled with stuff that is alive, and anything you put in it will interact with the stuff that is already there, in ways you may not have intended or expected.

We call this *stuff* “frames.” Frames are the lenses through which we interpret, understand and organise our experiences.

So the practice of framing is crafting messages and using metaphors that interact with the frames that already exist in our minds to produce the outcomes we want.

To illustrate the importance of framing, the Frameworks Institute sometimes uses the example of Jamie Oliver's campaign for a sugar tax.

Oliver ran a public information campaign targeting big companies, and pointing out how much sugar is in the food children eat, and the damaging effects it has upon our health. Campaigners thought if they could communicate to people that sugar was really bad for us, the public would back better regulation.

But what they didn't realise is that many members of the public already had a frame in their heads: the frame of *parental responsibility*. This meant that when people heard about all of the sugar in soft drinks and sweets, they didn't get angry with the food industry; they got angry with parents for irresponsibly feeding their children those foods in the first place. The campaign's failure to take this frame into account meant it ultimately wasn't successful.

Although a lot of day-to-day communications work focuses on reactions to events in the news cycle, and promoting your campaigns, it is also important to tell a wider story about the world to your audience. This needs to be a story which enables them to make sense of their experiences in a way that means they will be open to your messages.

## AUDIENCES

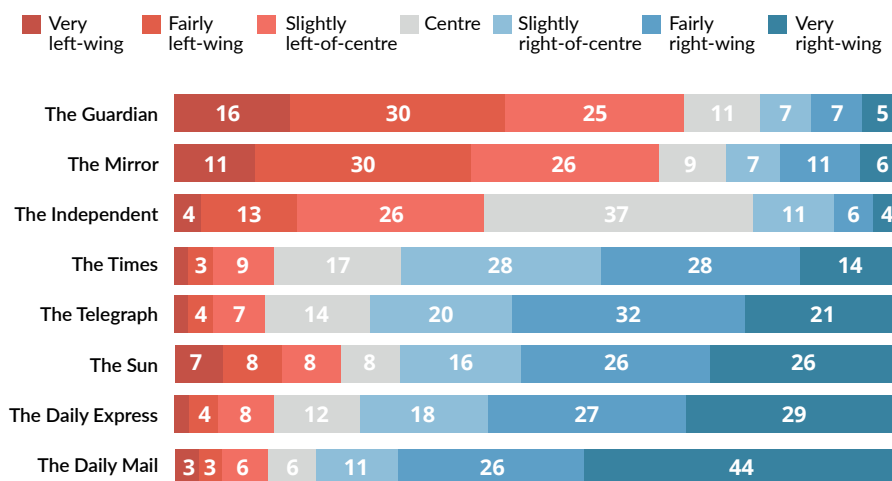
Before you start doing any press work - think about your audience. With whom do you want to communicate and why?

If your organisation is short of cash maybe you want to get coverage in the outlets that funders read/watch? If you want to influence Conservative politicians then perhaps you should be aiming for the Daily Telegraph. If it's a local issue then maybe you should be aiming specifically for the regional BBC television station?

When deciding where to target, you need to think about how many people read/watch the publication/show you are pitching to, what *kind* of people will see the story and whether the audience trusts the place where the story is being published/shown.

### HOW LEFT OR RIGHT WING ARE THE MAINSTREAM UK NEWSPAPERS?<sup>2</sup>

Some people talk about 'left', 'right' and 'centre' to describe parties and politicians. With this in mind, where would you place each of the following? (excludes those who said "don't know" for each paper - between 39-49% of respondents)





NEWSPAPER	DAILY REACH, PRINT
Metro <sup>3</sup>	2,645,000
The Guardian <sup>4</sup>	699,000
Daily Mail <sup>5</sup>	2,590,000
The Times <sup>6</sup>	978,000
The Sun <sup>7</sup>	2,866,000
Daily Mirror <sup>8</sup>	1,155,000
The Daily Telegraph <sup>9</sup>	902,000

WEEKLY LISTENERS FROM: Q1/2019	
LBC	2.3m <sup>10</sup>
LBC - Eddie Mair	90,000 <sup>11</sup>
LBC - Nick Ferrari	1.3m <sup>12</sup>
BBC Radio 4	11m <sup>13</sup>
BBC Radio 4 Today	7.32m <sup>14</sup>
BBC Radio 5 Live	5.4m <sup>15</sup>
BBC World Service	1.48 <sup>16</sup>
BBC Radio 3	1.83m
BBC Radio 2	15.36m <sup>17</sup>
BBC Radio 2 Breakfast Show	9.05m <sup>18</sup>
BBC Radio 1 Breakfast Show	5.44m <sup>19</sup>
BBC Radio Manchester	191,000 <sup>20</sup>
talkRADIO	339,000 <sup>21</sup>

## WHAT MAKES THE NEWS?

We've spoken to dozens of journalists about this guide, discussing the most common mistakes made by press officers. What comes up time and time again is 'not understanding news'. So let's break it down.

**A news story must include at least one of these:**

- ✓ New facts or statistics
- ✓ Something new being said by someone interesting
- ✓ A new event, stunt or action (particularly if it would make a great picture)
- ✓ A story that hasn't been told before
- ✓ Personal testimony that is moving, surprising or shocking

**And here's a list of things that don't (in themselves) constitute news:**

- ✗ Things you think are *very important*
- ✗ Your thoughts/feelings
- ✗ Old statistics that you've only just found out about
- ✗ An event you did last month but forgot to tell anyone about
- ✗ A story that's already been covered and for which you haven't got a new angle
- ✗ Personal testimony that is similar to other stories that have been covered before

Of course it's not an exact science - but the best way to work out what different outlets consider news is to watch, listen or read them. If you're pitching a story to BBC Breakfast but you only ever listen to LBC then you might struggle to know what they want. Each outlet has a different understanding of 'news'. It's your job to find out what they want.

Don't forget - you, your friends and family all consume news too. Think honestly about whether you would click on the story you are pitching or if you would say to a friend in the pub 'did you see the news today about .....?'. Maybe you would, but would your friends? Would your family? If the answer is no, then chances are it isn't news.

Being asked by your organisation to get coverage for something which isn't news is the eternal challenge of being a press officer. People don't like to hear that their ideas aren't interesting, but the more you send journalists things which aren't news, the less they will talk to you. If you can, try to build understanding within your organisation of what makes something news early on - and always be ready to be creative to make things newsworthy.

## MEDIA STRATEGIES / COMMS STRATEGY

Writing a media strategy is a useful way to focus your campaign or organisation's mind on the kind of media work that you want to do and the resources that will be needed to make it happen. In our view, a media strategy should be as short as possible so that people actually read it; it should try and boil down the essential elements of what you are trying to do. A strategy can be written for an entire organisation or for a specific campaign. There are many ways to write a strategy - and we have suggested a simple structure below.

Here is one structure we recommend, with some examples:

Make a **GAME** plan > **G**oal, **A**udience, **M**essaging, **E**ngagement

### Goal

- ★ Raise the profile of your campaign
- ★ Change government policy

## SMARTIE GOALS

There are many ways to set out your goals in your media strategy, but one we would recommend is using **SMARTIE** Goals. It's a new take on an old goal-setting system, introduced to us by The Management Centre in the USA.

**Strategic** – It reflects an important dimension of what your organization seeks to accomplish (programmatic or capacity-building priorities).

**Measurable** – It includes standards by which reasonable people can agree on whether the goal has been met (by numbers or defined qualities).

**Ambitious** – It's challenging enough that achievement would mean significant progress; a 'stretch' for the organization.

**Realistic** – It's not so challenging as to indicate lack of thought about resources or execution; possible to track and worth the time and energy to do so.

**Time-bound** – It includes a clear deadline.

**Inclusive** – It brings traditionally marginalized people—particularly those most affected—into processes, activities, and decision/policy-making in a way that shares power.

**Equitable** – It includes an element of fairness or justice that seeks to address systemic injustice, inequity, or oppression.

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#### **EXAMPLE:**

##### **SMART:**

*Secure 10 bookings in broadcast media by the end of year one.*

##### **SMARTIE:**

*Secure 10 bookings in broadcast media by the end of year one, with at least half going to women and a third to people of colour. Ensure that training and additional support is offered to those with less experience and that all spokespeople are part of decision-making on messaging and strategic thinking.*

#### **Audience:**

- ★ MPs
- ★ Funders
- ★ News journalists
- ★ Sections of the public

## Messaging

- ★ What is the story you want to tell?
- ★ What are your 3 key messages
- ★ How will you respond to attack?
- ★ What is your brand?

## Engagement with the media

- ★ Target journalists
- ★ Social media
- ★ Content Production

## CONTENT TO BE PRODUCED

CONTENT	CONTENT OWNER	DEADLINE

## RISK ASSESSMENT

RISK	IMPACT	MITIGATION
<i>Story doesn't attract significant press interest due to dramatic political news agenda and/or that it is the second Deepcut inquest</i>	<i>Campaigning messages lost, people are disappointed</i>	<i>Constant cultivation and updating of press contact lists, press releases emphasising current relevance of the story and importance of case studies</i>

## OVERALL TIMELINE

DATE/TIME	TASK	PERSON RESPONSIBLE

**EXAMPLE OF A COMMS STRATEGY: NEW ECONOMICS FOUNDATION**

Note this is wider than a 'media strategy' and includes all communications

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

The humble press release is sometimes referred to as the 'bread and butter' of being a press officer and other times regarded as outdated and useless. In our experience a press release is an invaluable weapon in any press officer's tool box - not least because it forces campaigns and organisations to agree and put down in writing exactly what they want to say to journalists.

The most important thing to remember with press releases is that they are almost pointless if used by themselves. Everytime you send a release you should remember that the journalist receiving it will see hundreds of them every day, and that you need to do more than click 'send' to make sure what you have written is read.

### **WHAT IS A PRESS RELEASE?**

It's a way of summing up the findings of your research or parts of your story into a clear and digestible form for journalists to understand and use.

The shorter a press release (within reason!), the better. Journalists are busy people; you need to be able to sum up the key and interesting parts of your story and if they need more info to write a piece, they'll contact you.

As you are not writing to your target audience directly, you need to write your press release in the **third person**, as if you were a journalist. The quotes are where you put in your opinion and they should be colourful, memorable and, if possible, use metaphors and imagery.

If the release is good, journalists will quote it verbatim in an article or report that they're doing or simply copy and paste it. This should be your aim!

## HOW TO FORMAT A PRESS RELEASE

This is by no means the only way you can write a press release but if you're not really sure how to go about doing one, it's a good rule of thumb:

- \* **Headline** – sum up what the story is, ideally in no more than 10 words
- \* **First paragraph** – say what the story is about and why it is important/interesting/new (a good opening paragraph should be able to stand alone)
- \* **Second paragraph** – present more details/findings/how the story came about
- \* **Third paragraph** – relevant, interesting and headline grabbing quote add quote from other organisations if possible
- \* **Notes to editors** – where journalists can find more information plus your contact details

### BASICS

- |                  |                      |                      |
|------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| ✓ What?          | ✓ Adding credibility | ✓ Use your quotes to |
| ✓ Why?           | ✓ Any other info and | get across emotion,  |
| ✓ Where and how? | contact details      | imagery and useful   |
|                  |                      | metaphors.           |



## EXAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

CASE STUDY -  
STANSTED 15 PRESS RELEASE**For immediate release****Stansted 15 Supporters rally against 'draconian charges'**

\*Rally outside the Home Office at 5.30pm on Tues 11th December

A rally will take place later today in support of the Stansted 15 - a group of protesters who were yesterday found guilty of terror-related offences for stopping a deportation flight from taking off.

The rally, which will be outside of the Home Office at 5.30pm today (Tuesday 11th December), will see defendants joined by their supporters as they protest their convictions and demand an end to deportation flights, indefinite detention, and the hostile environment. Hundreds of people are expected to attend.

The Stansted 15 learnt their verdict yesterday after a 10 week trial. The jury found all fifteen defendants guilty of intentional disruption of services and endangerment at an aerodrome under the 1990 Aviation and Maritime Security Act - a controversial use of terror-related law. The guilty verdict for peaceful protestors, was delivered on International Human Rights day.

Jo Ram, one of the Stansted 15 defendants, said:

"Though we were found guilty of this crime yesterday, we remain convinced that our actions prevented harm. This draconian charge should never have been brought in front of this jury. This is the wrong verdict for the wrong charge. Every day the Home Office treats people in the immigration system with brutality - yet it is peaceful protestors who will now spend the Christmas period worrying about what sentence we'll receive."

"Justice will not be done until we are exonerated and the Home Office is held to account for the danger it puts people in every single day. It endangers people in dawn raids on their homes, at detention centres and on these brutal flights. The system is out of control. It is unfair, unjust and unlawful and it must be stopped."

Shami Chakrabarti, Labour's Shadow Attorney General, responding to the guilty verdicts given yesterday to defendants in the "Stansted 15" trial, said:

"What a sad International Human Rights day, when non-violent protesters are prosecuted for defending the Refugee Convention, and are treated like terrorists. Labour in Government will review the statute book to better guarantee the right to peaceful dissent."

**ENDS**

For media enquiries please contact XXX on XXX or XXX on XXX  
Or email us on XXX@gmail.com  
Spokespeople are available for broadcast interview.

## COMMENTS

State when the release can be used

What rally?

When?

Why?

Where is that?

Main Quote

Emotive Language

Supportive quote  
Support quotes are important**TOP TIP**  
**STANDARDISE**  
**THE WAY YOU**  
**START QUOTES. SO:**

Jo Ram, one of the Stansted 15 defendants, ahead of the rally said:

and

Shami Chakrabarti, Labour's Shadow Attorney General, responding to the guilty verdicts yesterday said:

## HOW TO SEND A PRESS RELEASE

Sometimes you'll want to send multiple press releases at once - particularly if you're reacting to breaking news or if your story is good enough to hook journalists without a phone call. There are a number of ways of doing this - but we're going to assume that you don't have access to a paid-for provider which would do it for you (such as Gorkana).

The first thing you need to do is decide on a subject line for your email. This is important. An ideal subject line should be short, direct and eye catching. Don't try to be too clever - it needs to be understood in a split second by a journalist who doesn't have time to think.

### BAD SUBJECT LINE ❌

The Government's Repeal Bill has no provision here for ensuring laws are properly enforced by institutions

### OK SUBJECT LINE ✔️

Caroline Lucas responds to Repeal Bill

### GOOD SUBJECT LINE ✔️✔️

Caroline Lucas: 'Environment-shaped hole' in Repeal Bill

Once you've decided on your subject line you should paste your press release into the body of an email, and then paste the email addresses of your recipients into the 'BCC' box. This stops the journalists who receive it seeing the other journalists on your list. It's usually best to simply send the press release without any preamble if you're sending it to a large list of people.

## TOP TIPS SENDING A PRESS RELEASE

- ❶ Send the press release in the body of an email, never as an attachment
- ❷ Use normal fonts - and read the press release one final time before sending
- ❸ BCC the email addresses you want to send it to, so the journalists can't all see each other
- ❹ Make the subject line short, and interesting
- ❺ Send the press release at a normal time, not late at night
- ❻ Double check that your contact details are on the release

## COMMENTING ON BREAKING NEWS

Press releases aren't just used for setting out your own stories; they are also incredibly useful for issuing a comment on breaking news stories that your campaign or organisation has views on. A comment on breaking news does not require you to write an entire press release - instead you need to quickly describe what you are commenting on, then provide a hard-hitting quote that journalists can use in the news stories they are writing on the topic.

### CASE STUDY: GREEN PARTY RESPONSE TO BREAKING NEWS

**For immediate release: 13 July 2017**

**Caroline Lucas: 'Environment-shaped hole' in Repeal Bill**

Caroline Lucas, the co-leader of the Green Party, has said that there is an 'environment-shaped hole' in the Repeal Bill which the Government published today. Lucas is specifically concerned that the bill lacks provision for enforcing environmental laws.

She said:

"There's an enormous **environment-shaped** hole in the Government's Brexit plans. The Repeal Bill may transfer EU laws onto the British statute, but there's no provision here for ensuring that these laws are properly enforced by institutions in the UK. The Government knows that this simple transfer isn't enough to ensure that our environment is protected - and their refusal to legislate for specific environmental protections and enforcement is reckless.

"I'll be working with fellow MPs to table amendments to the Repeal Bill, specifically in order to force the Government to ensure that environmental laws are properly enforced as we go through the Brexit process."

**ENDS**

Contact: Matthew Butcher on XXXX or XXX@parliament.uk

### COMMENTS

If there is an 'Embargo' this is where you write it

Quick Description

Strong imagery makes quote more likely to be picked up

Contact details for follow-up interviews

## CASE STUDY - TRUMP BABY RAPID MEDIA RESPONSE

Part of being a press officer means responding to newsworthy events at a late stage. The Trump Baby demonstration is a good example of late response press work.

Trump Baby was already a popular story with press speculation on whether the Mayor's office was going to permit it to be flown. This was supported by a campaign and petitions for it to be allowed. The Trump Baby itself had great visual potential and provided the media with an eye-catching image for the news. These communication techniques were used to sustain the media attention and provide primed media opportunities.



### TOP TIPS:

- ✓ Be organised - control the messaging and angling of the story
- ✓ Stage a performance and involve the press in the lead-up, extend the coverage beyond the day of the event
- ✓ Have prepped spokespeople

Part of this involved proposing a 'test inflation' that was not required but was part of the spectacle and anticipation for the main event. They invited journalists, giving media access beforehand to cover the story in the run up to the actual day of Trump's arrival. It gave the team the opportunity to stage the performance and give journalists an exclusive insight and angle.

In the lead-up to interviews, the team;

- \* Worked out their key messages
- \* Put together a list of difficult questions and prepared answers
- \* Prepared a handful of good spokespeople

The interview requests were listed so that it was organised and the right spokesperson who was free could go out to a specific media outlet during the week, on the day of the 'test inflation' and on the day of the actual inflation. This involved walking around with a clipboard on both days and taking a very 'hands on' approach to controlling the interview process and making the most out of the opportunity.

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#### TOP TIP:

- ✓ Hire a photographer or have someone involved in the campaign document all steps of the process.
- 



## DIARY NOTES

A diary note (sometimes called a media advisory) is a very basic note sent out to journalists to alert them to an event in advance. It tends to be heavy on logistics (time, place etc) and light on narrative (no quotes etc). We recommend you send these out around a week in advance and do follow-up calls to alert journalists to them.

### DIARY NOTE: TRUMP BABY

**Date:** Friday 13th July

**Time:** Inflation from 0845, lift-off at 9.30am and the baby will fly until approx 11am

**Location:** Parliament Square, London

*Interviews available - please see contact details below*

A giant inflatable baby Donald Trump will fly up to 30m in the air on Friday, to welcome the US President to the United Kingdom. The inflatable, which has been described by Nigel Farage as “the biggest insult to a sitting US President ever” and slammed by Trump lawyer Rudolph Giuliani, will make its inaugural flight in front of the House of Commons.

ENDS

Contact for interviews/logistics:

Email: XXX@gmail.com

## USING THE PHONE

So you’ve written your perfect press release and you’re confident that it’s going to be of interest to journalists. The problem you face is that there are probably 100 other press officers thinking exactly the same thing as you right now.

There's no easy way to get journalists to read your press releases, but one of the best things you can do is to pick up the phone and speak to them. For some of us, perhaps especially those of us who message our friends and family much more than we phone them, picking up the phone and talking to a busy journalist can be incredibly daunting. But it needn't be. Once you've spoken to a journalist and they trust you, then you'll probably have to call them less.

### **Things to remember when ringing a journalist:**

- \* They are extremely busy so get to the point quickly
- \* They want to know what makes your story newsworthy
- \* They aren't your friend - so don't ask them about a holiday you know they went on because you stalk them on Twitter
- \* They will want to know that you understand what kind of stories/angles they are interested in
- \* Use common sense - don't call a lobby journalist about an event next week five minutes after the Prime Minister has resigned, for example

### **TOP TIPS**

- ✓ Write a script (see below)
- ✓ Try and ring in the morning (deadlines loom in the afternoon)
- ✓ Check 'have I caught you at a good time'
- ✓ Call their mobile if you can get a hold of it - landlines increasingly go unanswered

If you're nervous about ringing journalists, why not write yourself a short script to make sure you say everything you need to. Once you've gained confidence you won't need to do this, but it can be very helpful at the start.

### CASE STUDY - PHONING A JOURNALIST FOR STANSTED 15

Hi I am calling from [name of group/campaign/organisation].

- \* I'm just calling about a rally that is happening outside the Home Office tomorrow in support of the Stansted 15. We're expecting hundreds of people to come down, including leading politicians like Diane Abbott and Caroline Lucas.
- \* I know you wrote about the Stansted 15 already so thought you might like to write this up. It's really turning into quite a big story - especially since the group of celebrities came out in support. Are you interested?
- \* [Have their email address at hand] If it's ok I'll just send you the press release right now with all the details [click send]. At the bottom are my contact details so just let me know if you need anything else from us.

### BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH JOURNALISTS AND MAINTAINING A CONTACT BOOK

Getting your campaign or organisation into the media is significantly easier if you have existing relationships with journalists. In the introduction we discussed what makes a good press officer and many of the tips there will help you build relationships with journalists. Ultimately a good press officer will inevitably build up decent media contacts because you will provide journalists with news stories, quotes and assistance when they need it.

As previously stated, the best way to begin building relationships with journalists is by giving them stories. Although some journalists might be up for meeting for a coffee just to chat, most would much prefer to leave any meeting with a story or two which they can immediately pitch to their editors. You should also be sensitive to the fact that journalists are busy - when you offer a meeting you should suggest that you will come to them, take only 30 minutes and make clear why they would want to meet you. During the meeting you can also make clear to them that you are able to provide quick quotes or spokespeople when they need and that you'll always pick up the phone when they call.



If you have a very big story then you might want to meet senior journalists or editors, but in general we recommend meeting more junior journalists who might have a little more time and be more interested in building up their own contact books.

When you are speaking with the journalist you might want to tell them some things which are not for publication but you think they will find interesting. However we recommend using *extreme caution* when telling journalists anything that you wouldn't happily see in print. Sometimes you can share information with them that they might then be able to get confirmed by another source. In these situations there are some important phrases you should remember:

#### **ASSOCIATED PRESS GUIDELINES - TYPES OF CONVERSATIONS WITH JOURNALISTS<sup>22</sup>**

**On the record:** The information can be used with no caveats, quoting the source by name.

**Off the record:** The information cannot be used for publication.

**Background:** The information can be published but only under conditions negotiated with the source. Generally, the sources do not want their names published but will agree to a description of their position. AP reporters should object vigorously when a source wants to brief a group of reporters on background and try to persuade the source to put the briefing on the record. These background briefings have become routine in many venues, especially with government officials.

**Deep background:** The information can be used but without attribution. The source does not want to be identified in any way, even on condition of anonymity.

### **PRESS LISTS**

One of the most important tools a press officer can have is a good press list. Some larger organisations subscribe to online services which provide these lists, but smaller campaigns will need to make their own lists. Depending on your audience focus, you'll need to have a number of press lists split into topic areas, regions and media type. We'd recommend you use Google Sheets for press lists - make sure you have columns for Name, Outlet, Email, Phone Number and Notes.

## CASE STUDY - PITCHING TO GOOD MORNING BRITAIN

**Viewers:** 640,000<sup>23</sup>

### **When to Pitch:**

\* 9-9:30 am meeting with all departments

\* **3pm meeting for News & Programme items**

\* 7:30pm - Final decision for the news bulletin

\* The news agenda can change throughout the day and especially last minute

For breaking news - email the news editor with an available spokesperson & a line of what they'll say.

**Who to Pitch to:** News editor

### **Structure of the Show:**

- ① **Presenter Play-** usually 5 to 20 mins, lighthearted news (viral videos and controversial pieces)
- ② **News bulletin -**
  - a. Usually 6 mins long at 6am, 7am and 8am, around 3-4 stories in total
  - b. News comes from the wires (press and news organisations that provide news stories i.e. PA (Press Association), Reuters, APC (Association for Progressive Communications) - heavy reliance on press releases
  - c. The news editor tries to work out what will be the news the following morning
  - d. Interviews are always soundbites
- ③ **Programme Items**
  - a. For unique and quirky news stories that they want to shed light on
  - b. For example - political guests and pundits
  - c. Human interest person - a random and unusual story (for example the

man who walked across Antarctica)

- d. Debates - 7 mins, people who sit at opposite positions of the debate
  - i. Feature team finds the debate question
  - ii. Cast debaters through op eds and comment pieces
  - iii. The topic is usually something you would talk about at the pub
  - iv. Prepared to be grilled by Piers Morgan from Monday to Wednesday
  - v. Can be great exposure if you do well

### Pitching guide:

- \* Know where your story fits in the programme.
- \* Watch the whole 2.5 hours of the show to get a good idea of the shows structure (Don't pitch if you haven't watched!).
- \* Press release is very important, should be embargoed and the embargo should **break at midnight** of the day you want the news to air.
  - The show tries to move on the story from the night before so always looking for the latest piece.
- \* Get your press release on the PA (Press Association).
- \* Make sure you get your press release in as early as possible.
- \* Have a good and senior spokesperson **available** - someone who can be short and snappy. A 15 second soundbite will be recorded and slotted into the news bulletin.
- \* Always have a case study available if it's a big story; you need good visuals for this
  - A VT - Video package will be put together with good depiction of the General Views (GV).
  - Have a good setting for the spokesperson to be filmed in.
  - During filming Press Officers should be hospitable to the film crew and journalists.

## EMBARGOES

Most of the time you send a press release you can expect the information in it to be used by journalists immediately. Sometimes, however, you may wish to 'embargo' your story. This is when you set a time and date when the story can be published. Your embargoed press release shares confidential information with the journalist, but is shared with the understanding that it is meant to remain confidential until the stated publishing date. This date is stated very clearly at the beginning of the release. Embargoes are not legally binding - they rely on the trust between a press officer and a journalist, but they are very rarely broken.

### EXAMPLE - EMBARGOED PRESS RELEASE

Subject Line: Embargoed Report: Government Strategy has 'fatal flaws'

**STRICT EMBARGO: 00.01 on 30th August 2020**

**New Report lays bare 'fatal flaws' in Government Strategy**

A report **released today** by the campaign group End Corruption has laid bare a number of 'fatal flaws' in the Government's foreign policy.

And so on....

### COMMENTS

Make sure the Embargo is the first thing that is read

Make sure you put the date and time

Write the press release as if it is being read on the day of publication

Embargoes are typically used for launching reports - especially if they are complex and might require follow up phone calls with journalists ahead of publication. They are also used for stunts/protest actions that you don't want to be reported on in advance for legal/practical reasons. You might also send embargoed responses to a report that you know is going to be released but is itself embargoed. Sometimes you might use an embargo if you want to time an announcement for a certain time during the week - but you want journalists to have time to write the articles in advance. Another reason to use embargoed releases is to ensure information is released at the same time across a variety of media sources. Newspapers are generally produced daily with tight timelines, but magazines have long lead times and often require information months in advance. The embargoed date allows the stories to be published simultaneously.<sup>24</sup>

## EXCLUSIVES

An exclusive is an arrangement which sees a single journalist or publication being given a story to the exclusion of coverage elsewhere. Some journalists will only print exclusive stories, especially if they don't consider the story to be significant enough to cover if other publications have it. Others are likely to give much more prominence to exclusive stories - meaning they get more column inches, a place near the front of the newspaper or a higher billing on the broadcast news bulletins. If it's a complex story or you have sources which need protecting, it's often easier to go for an exclusive with a trusted journalist. If it's a big enough story others will write about the story after it has broken in the first publication.

There are occasions when you can also do a "dual" exclusive between two non-competing news outlets. For example you may ask a journalist at the Guardian and a reporter for Radio 4's PM programme if they would be interested in an exclusive embargoed for 5pm where the Guardian runs a story online and PM have the first interview with your spokesperson. You should approach this kind of embargo by deciding which publication's coverage is more important, and asking the journalist at that publication whether they would agree to this deal.

## ISSUING CORRECTIONS

It should be the aim of every press officer to never send information to a journalist which isn't right. Check and triple check releases. And remember the golden rule: if you aren't sure of something, don't send it. However, in the fast paced world of press, mistakes can and do happen - and how you handle it can help mitigate the damage.

**If you have sent a press release which contains an error, consider these things:**

- \* Is it a big story which is likely to get coverage?
- \* How big is the error? For example: is it factually wrong, or simply misleading? Is it defamatory?
- \* Is the error central to the story?

By answering these questions you will be able to determine how big your error is and the best course of action to issue a correction.

**For big errors (which you deem likely to be repeated in news coverage)**

- \* Draft a statement which includes:
  - The title of the press release which contained the error, along with the time it was sent (so journalists can identify the offending release)
  - A line or two which outlines the correct information (avoid repeating the error if you can)
- \* Send this statement to all journalists who received the erroneous release as quickly as possible

**For smaller errors (which you deem unlikely to be repeated in news coverage)**

- \* Draft a statement as above, but don't send it to everyone
- \* Save it on file so it's ready to be sent to any journalists who ask about the story or flag the error

**EXAMPLE - CORRECTING PRESS RELEASE**

**CORRECTION: Greens get best value votes in London Assembly elections**

On 13 December 2016 at 1pm the Green Party sent the press release: 'Greens get best value for money votes in London Assembly elections'.

*Please note that the Green Party received 2.3 votes for every pound it spent during the 2016 London Assembly elections not the amount previously specified.*

But what about when the media writes a story about your work or organisation that is inaccurate? What do you do?

- \* Contact the journalist who has written the story asking for a correction
- \* If they don't respond, speak to their editor
- \* If you still don't get a response and it's a very serious complaint, send a complaint to a press regulator such as IPSO (Independent Press Standards Organisation) or IMPRESS

## USING FOOTNOTES

Footnotes help you keep a press release short and concise. As a general rule you should only include the most interesting pieces of information in the body of the press release because this is what journalists read to assess if they are interested in the story. However if they do decide to cover your story, there is likely to be extra information they will need, such as in-depth figures or analysis, explained methodology or simply references for facts and statistics used. These things should go in the footnotes.

### CASE STUDY - GREEN PARTY PRESS RELEASE USING FOOTNOTES

#### **Green Party press release**

**For immediate release: 13 December 2016**

#### **Greens get best value votes in London Assembly elections**

The Green Party ran the cheapest London Assembly campaign this year after getting more votes than any other party for every pound spent.

When it came to overall spends the Lib Dems spent more than twice the Greens - yet got half the number of seats.

While the Lib Dems spent £234,906 during the regulated period and secured just one seat, the Green spent £90,054 and got two. The Women's Equality Party however spent more than four times the Greens but got no seats at all.

When it came to votes for the Assembly elections (excluding the Mayoral election), the Green Party got the best value for money, receiving 2.3 marks at the ballot box for every pound it put into the campaign.

In the Mayoral election Labour got 1.73 votes per pound with the Greens receiving 1.67.

Sian Berry, who was elected Green London Assembly member and came third in the mayoral race, said:

“Our campaign for Mayor and Assembly showed that if you put forward good ideas that come from Londoners and tackle the problems they face in their daily lives, you can win votes and seats without lots of cash.”

ENDS.

For more information contact: [press@greenparty.org.uk](mailto:press@greenparty.org.uk)

### Notes:

Full election spending figures available on request.

*How much parties spent during the regulated period, and how many seats they got:*

PARTY	SPENDING IN REG. PERIOD	SEATS
Labour Party	£662,423	12
Conservative Party	£628,594	8
Women's Equality Party	£415,662	0
Liberal Democrats	£234,906	1
Green Party	£90,054	2
UKIP	£84,368	2

*The number of votes each party got for every pound spent on the Assembly election campaign (excluding Mayoral):*

PARTY	SPENDING IN REG. PERIOD	TOTAL VOTES (ASSEMBLY LIST)	VOTES PER £ SPENT
Green Party	£90,054	207959	2.31
UKIP	£84,368	171069	2.03
Labour Party	£662,423	1054801	1.59
Conservative Party	£628,594	764230	1.22
Liberal Democrats	£234,906	165580	0.70
Women's Equality Party	£415,662	91772	0.22



*The number of votes each party got for every pound spent on the Mayoral election campaign (excluding Assembly):*

<b>PARTY</b>	<b>SPENDING IN REG. PERIOD</b>	<b>TOTAL VOTES (MAYORAL FIRST CHOICE)</b>	<b>VOTES PER £ SPENT</b>
Labour Party	£662,423	1148716	1.73
Green Party	£90,054	150673	1.67
Conservative Party	£628,594	909755	1.45
UKIP	£84,368	94373	1.12
Liberal Democrats	£234,906	120005	0.51
Women's Equality Party	£415,662	53005	0.13

## **BREAKING INTO BROADCAST**

All too often press officers find themselves spending a huge amount of time trying to get print coverage, while neglecting broadcast. This is a mistake. Broadcast media continues to be the most consumed form of news, and shareable clips on social media can hugely increase the impact of doing even niche shows. Broadcast media continues to garner a higher level of trust than print media - particularly the BBC.

Broadcast media is a very general term that encompasses any shows where it is voice, rather than written words, that will make an impact. It can mean news programmes like Today, the News at Ten or Newsnight, rolling live news like BBC News Channel and Sky News; magazine shows like Good Morning Britain and BBC Breakfast; commercial radio like LBC or talkRADIO and a whole range of other shows like podcasts, documentaries and music shows. A common mistake is to think that all broadcast efforts should be focussed on 'insider' shows like Today when you might have a far greater impact with your audience through other outlets.

### **The two main routes to broadcast are:**

- \* Pitching a story to a broadcast outlet
- \* Pitching a spokesperson to respond to a news story

It's also worth remembering that broadcast and print media do not operate entirely independently. Think how often an interview on the TV or radio will lead to print news stories and how often you switch on the radio and hear them say 'a report in the Times today said...'. A successful media strategy will always consider the relationship between print and broadcast media and how to best use it.

## WHAT DO BROADCASTERS WANT?

Broadcasters want good spokespeople who are well briefed, available at short notice and able to say things eloquently and with a good turn of phrase. They want press officers who answer the phone in the middle of the night for a morning show. They also want press officers who understand their shows and deadlines - and will make sure that spokespeople arrive for interviews with plenty of time to spare.

If you're pitching a news story to a broadcast outlet you should try and do this at least a day in advance, remembering that many shows decide the day before what stories they will cover. If you're pitching a spokesperson for a breaking news story you should get a comment or top lines over to broadcasters by email and follow up with phone calls. The aim is to get your spokespeople listed in editorial meetings as people who will add to debates on breaking news stories.

## HOW TO PITCH

Pitching a story or spokesperson to broadcast is very similar to pitching to print - except it can be less clear who to speak to. If you already have a contact, that's great. If not, follow the steps below.

### **If you are pitching a story:**

Call the switchboard and ask to speak to the newsdesk, then ask to speak to the person dealing with 'planning' for the day/time you want your story to break. If you are anxious about calling, prepare a short pitch as outlined before, and have an email with all the details ready to send straight away.

### **If you are pitching a spokesperson on a news story:**

Sometimes spokesperson slots will be booked by the planners as above - sometimes they will be booked by 'guest editors'. Don't be afraid to explain that you're pitching a spokesperson and ask who is best positioned to help. Once you are through, be prepared to outline the argument your spokesperson will make and have a quote or top lines ready to send by email or send one before you call.

**If you know which show you want to pitch to:**

Call the switchboard and ask for the producer for the show you want to appear on and pitch as usual.

**BEFORE AN INTERVIEW**

Before confirming an interview for a spokesperson you need to ask a set of basic questions.

As the time of the broadcast approaches, these are some of the details below that you might want to check with the producer, particularly if the slot was set up a day or two in advance. It's common for guests or the format of broadcast slots to change at the last minute.

- ☐ Is it live or pre-recorded?
- ☐ Is it in the studio or down the line?
- ☐ Who is the presenter?
- ☐ Are there other guests? If so, who?
- ☐ Will it be a 1-2-1 interview, a panel, or a debate?
- ☐ What topics are set to be discussed?
- ☐ What is the broad line of questioning expected?
- ☐ (If other guests) What position are other guests expected to take?
- ☐ (If radio) Will there be questions from callers?
- ☐ Where does the spokesperson need to be, and when?
- ☐ How long will the on air slot be?
- ☐ When will the spokesperson be out the door (i.e. how long will the whole process take)?
- ☐ (For Studio) Can you arrange transport?
- ☐ (For TV in studio) Is there makeup?
- ☐ Who is the best contact on the day?

## HOW IS A STORY GENERATED?

### Finding news to pitch:

Make sure you keep track of the top news on major media outlets daily such as BBC, Sky News and the Guardian. The top stories are likely to get onto TV or radio.

Always keep an eye on a forward planner if your organisation is subscribed to one. Look out for predicted headlines and exclusives, this way you can try and predict what could be in the news the following day.

When you've found a good story, find a good and confident spokesperson that can speak on the issue. Alternatively, a spokesperson can contact you with a news story that they want you to pitch for them to producers.

Get some top lines from them. These are (usually) three sentences that summarise their arguments. Make sure they strongly relate to the news story.

As press officer you would put this together into a coherent pitch and send it to the appropriate producer(s).

## FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUESTS

FOIs are a good way to generate a story and get it into news. You can use the information you find in a pitch to journalists who can write a piece using your findings. Alternatively you can pitch yourself to write a comment piece based on your FOI.

### Why are they good?

- \* They can tell you things you didn't already know. It's always good to have a story that no one else has or has thought of.
- \* FOIs give us control over when a story comes out because the story is based on new information and requested data
- \* Data from an FOI is hard to refute because the source is the government or other related public body.
- \* FOIs are good for data comparisons e.g. how much councils invest in x, y and z

- \* Journalists like and trust FOIs.
- \* They are really good at highlighting government hypocrisy and holding people accountable

### **Limits of the act / reasons they are rejected**

- \* If your request will cost too much to act on, if you have requested a large amount of data, if your scope is too wide
- \* Request is 'vexatious' - when an FOI appears to be trying to cause controversy rather than to obtain information
- \* When your FOI is a repeat or similar to past FOIs

### **What if your FOI is rejected?**

- \* Reduce the scope of your request - be more specific about your time frame and shorten it, if need be.
- \* If you don't get a response, you can complain to the body that you requested it from
- \* If the body still refuses you can appeal it by contacting the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). If you have the resources to pursue an appeal at the ICO (and some lawyers will do this pro bono) then the legal challenge and proceedings themselves can become a whole new angle to feed the story.

### **How to write an FOI?**

- \* Be clear and specific - they can be turned down if too sweeping.
- \* Be very specific on how you want the data presented.
- \* Include your name and address - this is a legal requirement.

## CASE STUDY - FOI

**To:** FOI@trade.gov.uk

**Subject:** Meetings between DIT DSO and the Saudi Arabian government/military

Dear Information Rights Unit

I would like to request a list of meetings between personnel from the Department of International Trade Defence & Security Organisation and representatives of the Government or of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia or its military.

I would like the list of entries to cover any meetings that involved people who were not part of the Department for International Trade and for it to cover the period from September 01 2018.

For each entry, I would like the date, duration, location, purpose and list of participants (with the organisations they represent and their positions).

Please provide the information in a table that shows where any information has been withheld and which is in a machine-readable form such as a spreadsheet. Please also include a list of any acronyms and abbreviations used.

Yours faithfully

XX

### **CASESTUDY - FOI REQUESTED BY CHRISTINE BERRY EXPOSES POLICE MISCONDUCT - 'THOSE KINGSNORTH POLICE INJURIES IN FULL: SIX INSECT BITES AND A TOOTHACHE' ARTICLE IN THE GUARDIAN**

Back in 2008, I was working in parliament with MPs trying to hold the police to account for their appalling treatment of Climate Camp protesters at Kingsnorth power station. In response to a parliamentary question, the Home Office Minister Vernon Coaker claimed that 70 officers had been injured in violent clashes with protesters and that their heavy handed tactics were a “proportionate” response. One of the staffers I was working with had been at the Kingsnorth camp and knew for a fact that this was BS. “We should FOI them,” he said. So we wrote to Kent police asking them to send us the accident logs for police officers working at Kingsnorth during the period of the camp. If I remember rightly, they initially refused to release them on security grounds (a standard tactic and one not to be disheartened by), but we persisted in using our rights to appeal the initial decision, and eventually got sent the documents.

We knew the logs would show that the Minister had misled parliament – as indeed they did, forcing him to apologise in the House of Commons. What we couldn’t have predicted was that they would also be absolute comedy gold. No police were recorded as having been injured in direct contact with protesters, but the logs did record some truly ludicrous pratfalls, ranging from “stung on finger by possible wasp” (*possible* wasp? I do hope they detained the offending insect under the Public Order Act to get to the bottom of this) to “officer injured sitting in car” (I’ve always wanted to know what they were doing – I feel like it must have been something *really* embarrassing).



Given all this, it was a surprising uphill battle to persuade our press team that there was a story here. I suspect they were wary of being associated with the climate campers, having themselves swallowed the propaganda claiming the protesters were violent. Eventually, sick of me bringing it up on a weekly basis at every single press meeting, they gave me the number for John Vidal at the Guardian and said I was welcome to pitch it to him myself (subtext: “and he’ll say no, and then maybe you’ll shut up about it”). Nervously (it was my first ever job and my first ever media pitch), I pitched him the story over the phone. We sent him the documents, and he wrote up the story. The Guardian put it on the front page.

The story went viral and remains probably the most high profile thing I’ve ever done: during the campaign to save FOI rights, Ian Hislop cited it as his favourite ever FOI request, and I once went to a comedy night where a stand-up comedian told the story as if she’d been the one who’d uncovered the information. We carried on using FOI to secure disclosures about the policing of environmental protests, as did some tireless journos at the Guardian – including Rob Evans, who has consistently dug up vital information to expose the abuse of police power. But for sheer persistence in the public consciousness, I’m not sure anything will top ‘Waspgate’. As my partner in crime said when we recently reminisced about it on Facebook, “it was the FOI that kept on giving”.

## **CASE STUDY: PITCHING A SPOKESPERSON TO PRODUCER**

### **CONTACTING SPOKESPEOPLE ABOUT NEWS:**

Hey X

So from what I can tell from this - looks like the Government is going to announce some sort of ASBO thing aimed at knife crimes tomorrow

Do you want me to pitch you?

Let me know - could contact some Sky people now to see if they will cover this tomorrow... and can also put a pitch out first thing tomorrow morning if we have some top lines ready.

---

### **SPOKESPERSON REPLIES WITH TOPLINES:**

Hi X,

Top lines would be: (apologies having not looked into what these orders are - I don't want to go into too much detail around ASBOs / CBOs)

- ① Once again the Home Office are bringing in draconian scare-tactics in a hollow attempt to appear 'tough on knife crime'. They know, and evidence shows us all, that serious youth violence in English cities cannot be stemmed with the blunt tool of policing.
- ② If anything, these measures will make the problem worse: further isolating, harming and restricting vulnerable young people - all whilst shielding the significant needs they and their communities have, which remain entirely unmet.
- ③ Discriminatory laws and more police are destructive, and they are smokescreens. I'd like to see this government give us any indication that they care about young people by taking seriously the wealth of existing evidence on strategies that DO work to reduce violence - and putting them into practice before more lives are lost, or destroyed.

## **CASE STUDY: PITCHING TO BBC RADIO 4 TODAY PROGRAMME**

**Listeners:** 6.8m weekly<sup>25</sup>

**When to Pitch:** Pitch in the morning and follow up early afternoon

- \* Early producers arrive at 10:30
- \* Editorial meetings around 11:30

**Who to Pitch to:** Producers

### **PITCHING GUIDE:**

#### **Pitching a spokesperson**

- \* Pitching a spokesperson means:
  - Developing a relationship with a producer/editor
  - Calling at the right time
  - Keeping in touch via email or text
  - Being patient

*'Hi I'm X from Y organisation – are you covering Z story today? ('Yes...') I'm calling because we've got an expert in this area who's a fantastic talker, and who's got an unusual angle on the story'*

- \* Tell them why they're a good fit, what their views are
- \* Follow up with clear email

#### **Pitching a story**

- \* One or two short paragraphs
- \* A spokesperson is advisable
- \* Following up by email
- \* Clear contact details and labelling

*'Hi, this is X from Y organisation. I'm calling because we've got a story we think the Today programme would be interested in. Can I talk to the editor? ...'*

- \* Explain story confidently
- \* Explain why it is newsworthy
- \* Have clear and short email ready

## DIFFERENT TYPES OF BROADCAST

<b>LIVE</b>	<p>Live broadcast - whether on TV or Radio - requires you to prepare your remarks then think on your feet. You are in control of what goes out, because there is no editing process.</p> <p><b>Tip: Remember that the microphone is always listening. Don't say anything with it on that you wouldn't want to say live on TV.</b></p>
<b>PRE-RECORD (OFTEN CALLED PRE-REC)</b>	<p>Pre-recorded interviews tend to be used when broadcasters want to use your views as part of a package of different voices. They can use any part of what you said, and edit it.</p> <p><b>Tip: Think very carefully about a 15 second 'soundbite' from what you've said that you would like the broadcaster to use. Make it interesting using images and metaphors.</b></p>
<b>DEBATE</b>	<p>Debates are particularly common on live television and radio. They pit your views against someone else's with a presenter acting as an intermediary.</p> <p><b>Tip: Don't shout over the other interviewer, and don't let their arguments derail you from delivering your key messages.</b></p>

<b>STUDIO</b>	<p>Most higher-profile broadcasters will want you to go into the studio for an interview. This tends to look best for the viewer and gives you the best chance of interjecting in debates. For radio interviews, you may prefer to be on the phone or down the line so you can read without a presenter noticing.</p> <p><b>Tip: If you're in the studio make use of hair and makeup, they will help you look your best for broadcast.</b></p>
<b>DOWN THE LINE (DTL)</b>	<p>Down the line interviews are when broadcasters send you to a studio which isn't where the presenter/host is. They are commonly used if you can't get to the main studio and are outside of London. For Television DTL interview you usually look directly into the camera. For both TV and Radio you will hear questions through headphones or an earpiece.</p> <p><b>Tip: If you are confused by a question or need time to think, you can always say 'sorry I didn't quite hear that can you repeat it' to buy yourself some valuable seconds (but use this sparingly).</b></p>
<b>PHONE</b>	<p>Many radio shows, particularly local and commercial stations, are willing to do interviews on the phone. This is more convenient but technical difficulties do happen and it's harder to cut in on presenters.</p> <p><b>Tips: It's much better to do this on a landline. If you have strong Wifi, Facetime audio or Skype give better sound quality.</b></p> <p><b>When you're on the phone it can be harder to make your point. Be ready to say 'can I just come in there?'</b></p>

<b>SKYPE</b>	<p>Increasing numbers of TV stations are willing to do interviews via Skype. This can allow you to get on air quickly, and from the comfort of your own home.</p> <p><b>Tip: Check what's behind you! People watching won't just look at your face, they'll see the bad art on your walls or your embarrassing book collection.</b></p>
<b>PAPER REVIEW</b>	<p>Many TV and Radio channels have regular paper reviews. These slots allow you to comment on the day's news and have a lighter-hearted discussion about the state of the world.</p> <p><b>Tip: Don't just think about the stories you want to discuss, think about the difficult ones that the other guests might bring up.</b></p>
<b>PHONE-IN</b>	<p>Phone-ins are when listeners can call into radio shows. They are common on LBC and other stations, and you might be invited on to listen to and respond to calls.</p> <p><b>Tip: Don't be afraid to disagree with people who call in, but do it respectfully. Don't talk over callers.</b></p>

## WHAT MAKES A GOOD SPOKESPERSON?

Broadcast media isn't easy, but with the right training and practice many people are able to master it. A good spokesperson will have an eye for messages that will resonate with the public and they'll be able to respond to difficult questions and they'll be capable of staying on track in spite of interruptions. Don't be fooled into thinking that 'confidence' is the only thing that matters. Many of the most confident people on our TV screens have that confidence as a result of class, race or gender privilege and we don't want the news to be dominated by middle-class white men. It is important to have emotional support and guidance ready for your spokespeople especially when their identity might result in a disproportionate amount of hostility - either on social media or in studios. This support will help with confidence and the comedown after an interview, whether it was friendly or hostile.

## COMMENTS

**PITCHING A SPOKESPERSON TO PRODUCERS:**

**Subject: New knife crime measures - criminal justice researcher available for bookings**

Hi X,

X, a postgraduate researcher on the criminal justice system at UCL with a lot of experience of youth work in London is available for TV and radio bookings today in response to the new Home Office measures designed to tackle knife crimes.

Link description to a profile if possible

Link to news story

Their top lines are:

- \* Once again the Home Office is bringing in draconian scare-tactics in a hollow attempt to appear 'tough on knife crime'. They know, and evidence shows us all, that serious youth violence in English cities cannot be stemmed with the blunt tool of policing.
- \* If anything, these measures will make the problem worse: further isolating, harming and restricting vulnerable young people - all whilst shielding the significant needs they and their communities have, which remain entirely unmet.
- \* Discriminatory laws and more police are destructive, and they are smokescreens. I'd like to see this government give us any indication that they care about young people by taking seriously the wealth of existing evidence on strategies that DO work to reduce violence - and putting them into practice before more lives are lost, or destroyed.

X is based in London and can be in studios. She is free all day apart from between 10.30 and 12.00

Get in touch to arrange a booking.

## HOSTILE INTERVIEWS - HOW TO HANDLE THEM

Though many presenters on television and radio remain neutral during interviews, there are some who will use their platform to actively undermine and attack you. People like Andrew Neil, Piers Morgan and Nick Ferrari are well-known for this but you'll find these people on local radio too.

### Top tips for hostile interviews

- ❶ Think in advance about the most likely lines of attack from the presenters. What angles might they take to try and undermine you? If you're nervous then take a calm and supportive person along with you to the interview.
- ❷ Check and double-check your statistics and have a source for them at hand. Expect everything you say to be scrutinised - so don't overstate your claims or say things you can't substantiate.
- ❸ Use the presenter's name, smile if they are being obtuse and be politely firm if they won't let you speak. A well timed 'Nick, you have asked me on here to give my views so if you would just let me finish my sentence' can be very effective.
- ❹ If you are asked a niche statistical question don't be afraid to say 'I don't have that number on me right now, but I'll happily look it up and send it over'. Use lines like 'I'm a campaigner, not an encyclopedia'. Don't pick numbers out of the air - do say 'I think what's clear from everything we are seeing at the moment is...'
- ❺ Don't go on social media afterwards. Hostile presenters tend to have an army of admirers who will critique you whatever you say. Ask trusted friends for constructive feedback.



## WHEN AN INTERVIEW GOES BADLY

Sometimes an interview will go badly, and that is ok. It may be that you forgot a statistic or that the presenter went on a tirade against you. Maybe you had a mind freeze or one of the other guests kept interrupting you.

Whatever happened, the most important thing is that the spokesperson involved gets in touch with someone to debrief and think about next steps. The press officer's job here isn't just to try and "fix" the problem, it's to be an ally to the spokesperson who had a bad time, listen to them and reassure them that it's never as bad as they think it is.

If it was a really bad interview you'll need to warn other people in your campaign or organisation to prepare any response needed such as a clarifying statement if someone misspoke. You should also watch out on social media for clips of the interview and be prepared to deploy other spokespeople on TV or radio to correct any serious mistakes. In this process, it's crucial that the spokesperson who had a hard time is supported, not criticised, and that you take some time at a later date to talk through what happened and why.

## HOW TO PREPARE FOR A BROADCAST INTERVIEW

Once you have secured an interview slot, it's time to get to work. No matter how well you know your subject matter, don't make the mistake of thinking you can turn up on the day and deliver without taking some time out first to prepare. Here are some easy steps which will help you get your message across.

### 1 Choose your message

Decide the key thing you want the viewer/listener to take away from the interview. For example, if you are doing a slot on fracking you might want your key message to be that the government is throwing money into a dying industry, while failing to invest in cleaner, cheaper renewable energy.

### 2 Do your homework

Make sure you really know the subject you will be speaking on, including latest news developments and what the "other side" is saying. How much research you need to do will depend on how familiar you are with the subject matter and how much time you have. Comment pieces are often more useful

than news stories or features for quickly understanding a subject and the arguments around it.

### **3 Compress and memorise**

Using the information you have gathered and the message you want people to take away, draft three key lines which you want to deliver on air and commit them to memory. It's okay to do more or less than three, but be realistic about what you will be able to communicate in the air time available. Be creative - remember that imagery, real life stories and metaphors help your message stick in people's minds.

Once you have nailed your lines, think about a key statistic that can be easily communicated from a well-respected source which back up what you are saying. Maybe you want to use more than one statistic - but remember that one clear and well communicated statistic is better than two or three ones that are more confusing. You might find it useful to make a crib sheet of the key lines and statistics to have with you on the day.

### **4 Anticipate attack**

It's very unlikely your views will go unscrutinised, so put yourself in the interviewer's shoes and think about how someone would dismantle the argument you are going to make. Draft rebuttal lines so that when the attack comes you are ready to quickly and effectively neutralise the attack and get back to your main message.

You can include key rebuttals on your crib sheet.

### **5 Practice!**

Find a willing friend or colleague and role play the interview a few times before doing the real thing (this works over the phone too). You might find some of your argument doesn't work in practice - that's okay! This is your chance to fine tune them until you feel confident you're ready to go on air (or your time runs out!).

### **6**

Have a support network available for you to help you before and after the interview. Broadcast can take a lot out of you because of the nerves, so make sure you have people around you at the interview and afterwards to help and affirm you.

## **HOW TO PITCH AND WRITE COMMENT PIECES**

Comment pieces are the most direct way for you to speak to your audience through the mainstream media. They allow you (almost!) complete control over what you're saying. They also give extra prominence to spokespeople who you may want to be booked for broadcast media. Comment pieces can be used as part of a campaign launch for your own work, or they might be just a way for you to give your take on the day's news.

Almost all print and online media have 'comment' sections. From the Guardian's 'Opinion' section to your local newspapers 'You View' pages, there's plenty of places to have your thoughts read by the people you want to speak to. And it doesn't have to be in the voice of your organisation either - comment pieces are a good chance for supporters of your cause or campaign to add weight to what you're doing.

### **PITCHING TO COMMENT DESKS**

When pitching to comment desks the most important thing to consider is the audience of the outlet you would be writing for. The Telegraph are unlikely to take a piece in favour of nationalising the railways while your local newspaper isn't going to be interested in anything without a local angle.

### **WHAT MAKES A GOOD COMMENT PIECE**

A good comment piece will be well-researched, easy to understand, convincing and informative. It won't be full of dry facts and statistics, but it won't be entirely polemical either. It should meet the reader where they are and take them on a journey to understand an issue and be persuaded by your view.

It's crucial that you think carefully about the style of your piece. Tabloids tend to want shorter sentences and paragraphs, while some newspapers like the Financial Times want more facts and figures. You need to be adaptable to the place you are pitching too.

### TOP TIPS PITCHING TO COMMENT DESKS

- 1 Email a short (2-3 line) outline of what your piece is about and who the author will be. Be sure to mention why the article is interesting right now and why the author is the right person to be writing it.
- 2 Do not send the entire article - they won't read it.
- 3 Don't pitch the same piece to multiple places at the same time. It's embarrassing when two people say 'yes' and you have to turn one down.
- 4 If you're pitching a piece in response to news then be ready to have it ready within two hours. If you don't have time to write it, don't pitch it. And if you're writing it for someone else, make sure they have time to edit/sign it off.
- 5 Pitch first thing in the morning if you're responding to news.

It's best to plan out your comment piece in advance - thinking carefully about how you introduce your audience to a subject that they might not know much about. The first line should be bold and eye-catching, and the main thrust of your piece should be set out as early as possible so people know what they are reading. It's usually worth engaging with counter-arguments in your piece, to negate easy attacks, and then finish with a concluding paragraph that neatly sums up the piece in an emotive way.

### TOP TIPS WRITING A COMMENT PIECE

- 1 Make a plan before you start
- 2 Write it from a first person perspective, and don't plug your organisation too much.
- 3 Research your stats/facts and provide hyperlinks to all of them to make it easier for the editor.
- 4 Open with a bold first sentence. Don't hold back.
- 5 Use simple language and shorter sentences whenever you can.
- 6 Engage in counter-arguments if you expect to be attacked.
- 7 Keep it to 700 words or less (check word length with publisher)
- 8 Ask someone to read over the piece before sending.

## CASE STUDY - PITCHING TO THE GUARDIAN'S OPINION DESK

**Circulation online:** 2,329,000<sup>26</sup>

**When to Pitch:** Before 9.15am in the morning

Opinion piece meeting, bringing together things people have planned, lined up for online, and the news for the day (2 or 3 different ideas from each editor)

**Who to Pitch to:** the 8 opinion editors ([firstname.lastname@guardian.com](mailto:firstname.lastname@guardian.com))

### Pitching guide for an opinion piece:

- \* One person's opinion that makes a discrete argument and is pegged to a piece of current news
- \* No quotes or interviews, just your opinion and a strong line of argument
- \* Length should be a few paragraphs that simply outline the argument
- \* A news peg - doesn't have to be the biggest news of the day, just needs to be news of the day that it topical. Can be small news, or a new piece of research, or something that your organisation is doing that should or is making news - why now?
- \* Social media can be a source of news as well
- \* Exciting, interesting and controversial - it has to stand out
- \* Be aware of what else has been written about - there are a lot of comment pieces about already. See what the arguments are around your topic
- \* Explain why you are the best person to write the piece - be confident that you are the expert on the topic

### Ghost-writing

- \* This is fine, especially if the person in the campaign doesn't speak English as their first language.
- \* Ensure the piece has been signed off and okayed by the person you are ghost-writing for
- \* CC the original writer or the person signing it off in the email

\* The ghost-writer is also entitled to the fee

Opinion editors are looking for contributors who are experts and/or have lived experience of the issue.

## GHOST-WRITING

One of the most valuable tools press officers have is writing skills and the ability to lend them to other people. Most of the time press officers don't write in their own names, but instead draft pieces for other people to add their own names too. This is mostly common inside our organisations or when working for politicians or other high-profile people, but often the most effective ghost-writing will see you working closely with people from outside your organisation whose voices on an issue are likely to be persuasive. Examples of this might be: detainees writing about immigration detention, people on benefits writing about the welfare state, doctors writing about the NHS. These people are likely to be more effective than the CEOs of charities or other campaigners on the issues who aren't actually affected by them.

When pitching a ghost-written piece you do not tell the comment desk that it isn't being written by the author, you simply say that you'll have a piece from them which you're coordinating. Editors know that ghost-writing happens, but it's not usually acknowledged unless you are asked.

Typically the process of ghost-writing a piece will begin with the ghost-writer speaking to the named author on the phone. You should ask them questions to elicit the information and language you need for the piece; ask them what they would like the focus of the piece to be. Remember this is their piece and they need to be happy with the direction it takes.

After speaking to the named author (and confirming with them the timetable for the piece) you should do a first draft and send it over to them. They can then make edits and suggestions before you do the next (hopefully final) draft.

### **CASE STUDY: THE NO WATER CANNON CAMPAIGN**

When we launched the 'No Water Cannon' campaign in London we particularly wanted to influence Conservative MPs and the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson. These targets meant that a comment piece in the Guardian or Independent wouldn't be as effective, so we needed to come up with a plan to persuade a right wing media outlet to take a piece from us.

We decided that our best bet was to pitch a piece from Dietrich Wagner, a German man who had been partially blinded by a water cannon. The human interest angle made it appealing to the Telegraph and they accepted the piece.

That was the easy part. We then ghost wrote the piece in English after reading translated notes from Dietrich about the incident. We then needed to translate the piece to German so Dietrich could have it read to him. He then made suggestions and we did a final edit before asking him for sign off. The completed piece was sent to the Telegraph and formed part of the targeted campaign at Conservatives which eventually led to the cannon being sidelined then scrapped.

### **HOW TO DEAL WITH REJECTION**

One of the most important lessons to learn with media and PR work is how to deal with a rejection to a pitch idea.

Rejections are an inevitable part of working with journalists and producers. The news cycle is so fast-moving, that what is a huge story one moment becomes yesterday's news at the drop of a hat.

#### **So what do rejections look like?**

- \* Sometimes you send out a huge number of pitch emails, and get no response.
- \* Sometimes you work one-on-one with a journalist who initially seems really excited by the idea, only for them to go cold on you and stop responding.
- \* Sometimes the story is all set up to go, you've got a spokesperson in place to do an interview or you have an exclusive ready to go in a newspaper, and then it all gets dropped at the last minute for another story.

### **The important things to remember with all rejections is**

- \* Don't take it personally
- \* Don't take it out on the journalist/producer (you don't want to jeopardise that relationship, and sometimes the decision is out of their control). However, it's a good idea to follow up with them to find out why the story wasn't right in that instance.
- \* Learn from the experience. Was it not the right time to pitch that story? Did you send it to the relevant people? Did a bigger news story supercede your story?

### **Things you can do in advance, before or after pitching a story**

- \* Follow up with the journalist/producer and ask if the story is still of interest if you have not heard back from the initial pitch. We don't mean start calling them every five minutes after you send the pitch and get no response, but wait a reasonable amount of time and just check in with them. If you've tried a few times and had no response, you should let it go, as you don't want to become one of the addresses in their inbox that they avoid.
- \* Get feedback. If you're concerned ask someone you trust to look over your pitch before you send it and ask their opinion.
- \* Canvas other trusted media/PR people who you know are also sending in stories, and check if they're about to launch a campaign that could overshadow your story
- \* Check a news ahead planner to see what else is coming out that week/month so you're not competing with those stories



## **REGIONAL AND LOCAL MEDIA**

### **WHY PAY ATTENTION TO LOCAL MEDIA?**

For many progressives, particularly those living in London, regional and local media is treated as irrelevant. It is true to say that most people, and especially younger people, do not access most of their news from the local and regional media, but the evidence makes clear that it is a profound mistake to dismiss its relevance.

Local media is a great space for local and community activists to speak on their issues. Local media can be much less intimidating and welcoming to the spokespeople you pitch. There are fewer 'shock jock' presenters who mainly have reactionary and hostile views on what their guests say. Working with grassroots activists in some regions can help lift the voices of underrepresented identities and causes in that area, and having less aggressive presenters can be encouraging and boost their confidence.

#### **CASE STUDY - RAAJ FM (BIRMINGHAM 91.3 MHZ)**

RAAJ FM is a commercial radio station in Birmingham. It features a variety of shows, and runs 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Through a mix of Punjabi music, news from Punjab and local news it caters specifically for Punjabi people living in the region.

RAAJ FM specifically seeks to feature the varied social, cultural, educational, youth, religious, music, sports, disabled and minority activities and interests of the local community - and as such is a good example of the kind of station that would have a keen interest in race and migration organisations working in the area.

The typical consumers of local media also tend to be from an audience that is harder to reach when using other mediums; they are often older, less tech-savvy and are heavily invested in the area where they live. According to publisher Johnston Press, 11.5 million people read a local newspaper but do not read a national one and 60% are likely to act on something they have seen in their local paper.

Local media also tend to be on the lookout for 'easy' stories and far more likely to run copy provided to them by charities and campaigning organisations. As such, social justice organisations have a golden opportunity when it comes to getting their message out in the local media.

## **WHAT IS THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE REGIONALLY?**

### **BROADCAST**

According to Ofcom, in 2016 43% of people said they watch regional and local broadcasts on BBC TV and 31% said they do on ITV - both numbers are an increase on previous surveys. Around 7% of people get news from local BBC radio, and 10% from local commercial radio stations.<sup>27</sup>

### **BBC RADIO**

Britain has a dense network of local BBC radio stations, each of which covers a smaller area than their regional television counterparts. Unlike regional television news, local BBC radio runs shows all day, every day. This means that there is more room for discussion, debate and features and it is typically easier to get coverage on the radio than it is on the television news.

### **COMMERCIAL AND COMMUNITY RADIO STATIONS**

Each area of Britain is also covered by numerous commercial radio stations, which tend to either be regional variations of major brands (Heart, MagicFM, SmoothFM etc) or hyper-local stations (Bolton FM, Raaj FM). Listener numbers for these individual stations tend to be fairly low, though some such as Heart Regional and Smooth regional have as many as 7% of radio listeners in the area tuning in.

## **PRINT / ONLINE**

It is typical for newspaper companies to syndicate copy across a number of titles in a region, with unique front pages for each local edition. Local print journalism is dominated by a handful of publishers, with 5 companies in command of 81% of local newspaper titles.<sup>28</sup>

People also tend to trust local newspapers more than national news. A survey by YouGov in 2013 showed that two-thirds of people trust what they read in their local paper while fewer than a fifth trust what they read on Facebook, according to a survey of more than 2,000 adults. According to Ofcom 48% of people who access local news do so through social media.<sup>29</sup>

There's no doubt that the influence of regional media has waned over the years, but with increasing numbers of people accessing it through social media, and with it being trusted as a news source, there are some signs of a resurgence. The number of people who consume news in this way alone suggest that it should be engaged with by social justice groups, as it's clearly an important news source for many people, including decision-makers in local communities.

## ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF MEDIA

Alternative forms of media such as soft coverage, podcasts, documentaries and more are becoming major sites for coverage. These outlets are not traditional in the way news is conveyed but they allow you to reach a wider set of audiences.

We've found that many people working in campaigns have tended to focus almost exclusively on 'hard' news coverage through the usual mainstream media outlets. This is a mistake, not least because millions of people do not read or watch news coverage but instead access new information through music magazines, lifestyle websites, podcasts and other types of media.

When assessing your audience in your media plan we recommend that you don't just think about the news programmes they watch or the newspapers they listen to, but instead think about the other media sources they use.

### SOFT COVERAGE - STYLIST

**Circulation:** 400,359 (July 2017 to December 2017)<sup>30</sup>

**Readership:** Urban-dwelling women, late 20s to early 30s (probably up to late 50s, good disposable income, 75% with undergrad degrees and national

**When to pitch:** Friday afternoons, not lunchtime

**Who to pitch to:** the specific editor for that topic (do not send out mass emails)

#### Pitching guide:

- \* Make the pitch super easy for people to read -
  - Put the dates/contact detail/address upfront and easy to find
- \* Advance warning, however sometimes it is just luck
  - Persistence with email is better
  - Subject line should be to the point

- \* Pictures are a plus!
- \* Favour pieces with a news hook with lifestyle content
  - e.g. Climate change stories - Plastic is a part of the issue that people feel they can handle so it is more palatable and easier to read.
- \* They could contact you - make yourself known as an expert in a subject and have a direct email contact details clear on your website
- \* Case studies and research data should be on hand.
- \* Not geared for Breaking News, print is planned far in advance
- \* Features budget constraints make it difficult to send a writer out of the country for a story. You need an angle that will interest UK audiences, saying 'this person is very much like you', for example 'What it's like to be a girl around the world'

## PODCASTS - THE GUARDIAN'S TODAY IN FOCUS

**Listeners:** 200,000 listens per episode so far (2019)

**When to Pitch:** By the end of the week ready for Monday morning ideas meeting. Or... as news doesn't age on podcasts - pitch anytime during the working day via email or Twitter direct message

**Who to pitch to:** Producers (Rachel Humphreys)

### Pitching guide:

- \* Come with new stories that aren't in the paper, or in *The Guardian*
- \* Presenter Anushka Asthana – always looking for stories that connect with her, and always talks about personal experience (do your research!)
- \* Make sure you have the knowledge of the programme
- \* E.g. 'I know you're doing..... I have this story or case study'
- \* Know how you fit into their programme
- \* Keep it short and simple- explain yourself/your charity what you do/ give the guest's name and what they are about straight away  
E.g. 'It would be great to have a chat on the phone' – (producers have no time for coffee or lunch)

# CHALLENGES: HOSTILE JOURNALISTS, CRISES AND MISTAKES

Being a press officer isn't an easy job; especially when you come up against hostile journalists and media crises. It's an easy thing to say, but keeping a cool head is essential at times when those around you are panicking, and following a few simple guidelines at moments of strain can help stop situations escalating beyond your control.

## HOSTILE JOURNALISTS

At some point you will come across hostile journalists. Whether they have a political difference with your campaign, an overbearing and underpaying editor, or they haven't slept for a week, you might find yourself at the sharp end of someone else's problems. You may encounter this hostility when you pitch stories, or they might send unwarranted questioning your way on issues beyond your control. You may even see these journalists tweeting in anger about you or your cause. The key thing to remember though, is that you shouldn't take these kind of things seriously.

### TOP TIPS FOR DEALING WITH HOSTILE JOURNALISTS

- 1 Be unfailingly polite at all times and emphasise that you're going to do all you can to help them.
- 2 If they are unapproachable then find another journalist to talk to at their news organisation.
- 3 Don't be pushed into giving comments over the phone - always send email comments
- 4 Don't attack them back on social media, even if they are mean about you.
- 5 If they are consistently rude or aggressive consider sending them a polite email asking them if there's any sort of problem they'd like to discuss. If you do then speak to them, spend your time listening and make sure not to get angry yourself.

## DEALING WITH A CRISIS

It's a press officer's worst nightmare. The phone rings at 4pm on a Friday afternoon, and it's a hack from a top tabloid asking for comment on a story regarding your organisation. Maybe you trained up some activists who went on to get arrested, maybe your director has been avoiding tax, maybe someone who used one of your services went on to commit a crime. Your funding might be at risk, or your reputation among those you work with might be about to be in jeopardy. You might not have even known about the issue you're being called about and now your Friday evening is about to be ruined because you need to deal with this crisis.

Every organisation should have a clear, short 'Crisis Comms' plan laid out. It should detail who needs to know what, and how to respond to a developing situation.

### A BASIC CRISIS COMMS PLAN

- 1 Potentially damaging media requests should never be responded to on the phone. Whoever receives the request should ask for it in writing - and say as little as possible on the phone. You may want to use the phrase 'that's the first I have heard of it'.
- 2 One person should immediately be the designated contact point with any journalists covering this issue. Other team members should be reminded that they should not speak to any journalists, and that there's no such thing as a "friendly chat" - especially now.
- 3 A polite holding email should be sent to the journalist, saying that you're looking into the issue and will in touch very soon.
- 4 The facts of the situation should be established immediately. Convene a meeting of the least number of people needed to work out what has happened and what needs to be done. It might be that you want to ask advice from comms experts at this point (NEON are happy to help, for example).
- 5 A short statement, if possible from an unnamed spokesperson, should be drafted. Think carefully about what you want to say. It is widely believed that it is better to be as honest as possible as early as possible. If there are further aspects to the story that are likely to come out later, it's best that you get them out there now.

## A BASIC CRISIS COMMS PLAN

- 6 If the story is big enough to be featured widely on broadcast media then you might want to think about 'putting someone up' to defend your reputation. Think carefully about who this might be and take your time to work on key messages and responses to attack.
- 7 You may now need to speak to key stakeholders - such as funders, supporters and members. Think carefully about how you do this - your supporters might post on social media in outrage, but that could end up driving many more people towards reading negative stories about your organisation.

## MAKING MISTAKES

It happens to all of us. We make mistakes. The best you can hope for is that you don't make too many and they don't spiral out of control.

### Mistakes made by this handbook's authors include:

- \* Sending out quotes attributed to their boss which weren't ever signed off, and then watching on as their boss was grilled on quotes they had never seen on live television.
- \* Somehow swapping the word 'fracking' for the word 'christmas' in a press release sent about the launch of a campaign.
- \* Agreeing to place exactly the same comment piece with two major newspapers, and then getting shouted at by both.
- \* Completely misreading statistics on rail fares in the first week of a new job and sending out a press release which inflated the fare increase by about 100%.
- \* Booked spokespeople onto major broadcast shows who then completely forgot about it and missed the slot.



- \* Getting the key facts wrong in a story, because they hadn't checked them properly and wanted to get the pitch out asap, and then being contacted by the producer from Newsnight to let them know why their pitch (which they had sent out to over 200 people) was completely inaccurate.

The point here isn't just to exorcise our demons by listing our errors, but instead to show that we do all make mistakes. There are some basic principles and guidelines to follow if you do make mistakes - and they are worth following.

### **TIPS FOR AVOIDING MISTAKES**

- 1 Check and double-check your press releases, especially any statistics. Ask someone else to proofread writing whenever possible.
- 2 Always double-check with spokespeople that they know what time and where they are going to do broadcast interviews.
- 3 Make a note of bookings and comment pieces you have placed to ensure you don't double up.
- 4 Never send quotes out without getting them signed off (unless you have a 'no sign-off procedure' in place).

### **TIPS FOR FIXING MISTAKES**

- 1 If a press release has major errors which risk being reported, you need to issue a correction. In the subject of the email you should write the word 'Correction' very clearly.
- 2 If you've given a journalist the wrong information, you should get in touch with them directly and tell them what you've done wrong.
- 3 If a spokesperson can't make a broadcast interview let the producers know as soon as possible. If they miss it without warning send the producers a message apologising profusely.

## TOOLS AND TIPS

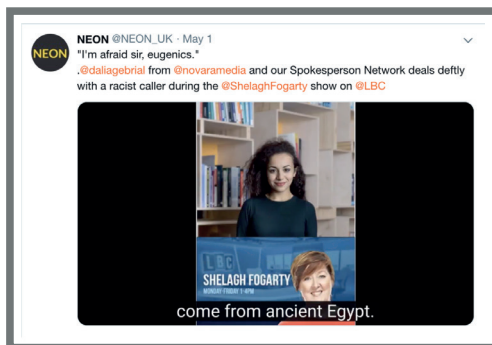
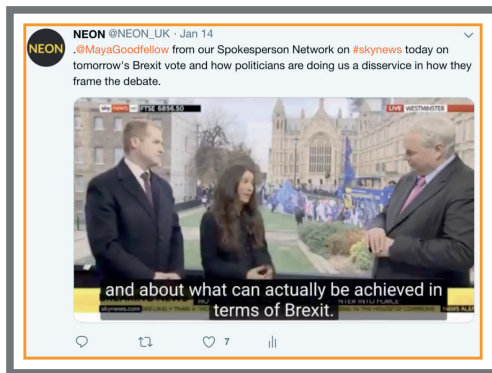
### ① Schedule for important broadcast programs

TV		
<b>Politics Live</b>	BBC One	12.15pm Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday 11.15am Wednesday
<b>Victoria Derbyshire</b>	BBC Two	10am Monday to Friday
<b>Newsnight</b>	BBC Two	10.30pm Monday to Friday
<b>All Out Politics</b>	Sky News	10am & 10.30am Monday to Friday
<b>Sunrise</b>	Sky News	6am Monday to Sunday
<b>Press Review</b>	Sky News	10.30pm, 11.30pm, 12.30am Daily, except Friday no 12:30am showing
<b>Channel 4 News</b>	Channel 4	7pm Monday to Friday, 6.30pm Saturday, 5.20pm Sunday
<b>Evening News</b>	ITV	6.30pm daily
<b>BBC Breakfast</b>	BBC News	6am Daily
<b>Good Morning Britain</b>	ITV	6am Monday to Friday
RADIO		
<b>The week with John Nicholson</b>	Talk Radio	4pm Sunday
<b>Jeremy Vine</b>	BBC Radio 2	12pm Wednesday to Friday
<b>Shelagh Fogarty</b>	LBC	1pm Monday to Friday
<b>Nick Ferrari</b>	LBC	7am to 10am Monday to Friday
<b>Today Programme</b>	BBC Radio 4	6am Monday to Friday
	BBC Radio World Service	All Day
<b>Woman's Hour</b>	BBC Radio 4	10 am Monday to Saturday

- ② **It is helpful to use social media like Twitter and Facebook to extend the reach of your work.** For instance if you have a spokesperson from the organisation that has featured on broadcast it is always a good idea to clip the video or audio and share it on social media channels.
- a. It is also useful to launch reports on social media channels, or reach out to organisations and place it in their newsletters.

### CASE STUDY: CLIPPINGS & SOCIAL MEDIA CASE STUDY

- \* Download the software for example Movavi Video Editor 15 Business or Showmore.com
- \* Watch a tutorial on Youtube
- \* Use the 'Record Screencast' option to clip audio and video
- \* For subtitles, upload the video onto YouTube
- \* Using the YouTube Studio Beta function, go to transcriptions and add your own subtitles. They can also be auto generated on YouTube and on Facebook (Make sure to proofread them).
- \* Then record screencast again and export to your desired format and post on social media.
- \* For audio clippings, you can add a photo of the person speaking and the presenter/show. This can also be done on Movavi.



**③ Forward Planners are useful for tracking what could be the news the next day. These are paid services.**

- i. Press Association - [www.mediapoint.press.net](http://www.mediapoint.press.net)
  - ii. Forward Planner - <https://forwardplanner.com>
  - iii. Reuters Connect
- b. You can also sign up to mailing lists this can keep you abreast with what's happening in different areas. Some good free ones are:
- i. Paul Waugh - Waugh Zone
  - ii. Stephen Bush - Morning Call
  - iii. Jack Blanchard - London Playbook
  - iv. The Guardian morning briefing
- c. Customer relations management software can help you organise your contacts and interactions with them:
- iv. Gorkana (an up to date database and directory of journalists. Gorkana can also be used for creating lists of journalists and sending press releases. It's pricey, but if you can afford it, also worth it).
  - v. Roxhill Media
  - vi. Prezly
  - vii. Nation Builder
- d. Media monitoring services

## **APPENDIX 1.**

<b>Al Jazeera</b>	lastnamefirstnameinitial@aljazeera.net
<b>BBC</b>	firstname.lastname@bbc.co.uk
<b>Capital Radio</b>	firstname.lastname@capitalfm.com
<b>Channel 4 News</b>	firstname.lastname@itn.co.uk
<b>Daily Mirror</b>	firstname.lastname@mirror.co.uk
<b>Evening Standard</b>	firstname.lastname@standard.co.uk
<b>Huffington Post</b>	firstname.lastname@huffpost.com
<b>ITV</b>	firstname.lastname@itv.co.uk
<b>LBC</b>	firstname.lastname@lbc.co.uk
<b>London Live</b>	firstname.lastname@londonlive.co.uk
<b>NewStatesman</b>	firstname.lastname@newstateman.co.uk
<b>Sky News</b>	firstname.lastname@sky.uk
<b>talkRADIO</b>	firstname.lastname@talkradio.uk
<b>The Guardian</b>	firstname.lastname@theguardian.co.uk

## ENDNOTES

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