



Working with the media

Working with the media can be as crucial as working with your local authority as they can have a profound effect on public opinion and policy.

As a campaigner, you want as many positive stories about what you are doing in the press as possible. This is a basic guide to making that happen.

Who to contact

In most cases you will want to contact and build a relationship with your local press. It is unlikely that as a local campaigner you will have much need to liaise with national media on a regular basis.

[Get in touch](#) with Cycling UK for a list of local media contacts (if you need one). The contacts may change every now and then so if you haven't had an updated list in a few months, drop us a line.

Do your own research into local press contacts with some simple Google search terms like "[Area] news".

If you would like to talk through your media strategy, don't hesitate to get on the phone to us.

How to contact

When you email out correspondence, if you don't use a dedicated emailing system such as Mail Chimp, it is best practice to bcc the media contacts and put your own email address in the 'To' section. Never put all your media contact details into the "To" line.

Include a date.

Make it clear whether the press release is "For immediate release" or "Strictly embargoed until [date/time]". If you're sending your release out under embargo, such as in advance of an event, the usual format is: time, day, date, eg "Strictly embargoed until 00.01 Tuesday 20 June 2017".

The time and date at which you send your release will have an impact on your potential coverage – particularly if you are targeting a daily, weekly or monthly publication. To maximise the impact, you ideally want to send things out first thing in the morning, so that they are at the top of inboxes and can make it into the news the same day.

Sending out a press release a couple of days early or in the middle of the day but embargoing until one minute past midnight on a certain date can be a good way of getting into that morning's papers.

What to send

Press releases

Press releases are the most common form of communication you will have with media.

These are generally published after an event. An ops note (see below) is normally sent before an event and will be used to alert the media to a specific event. You may wish to send both, particularly if you have organised an event (eg a bike ride or demo).



Have a look at this [list of press releases](#) that Cycling UK has published. Feel free to use these as templates.

You will notice they all follow a similar formula:

- A punchy headline. Remember your target audience is not cyclists or campaigners – it is the general population.
- Jargon-free. Most people do not understand or want to understand technical language.
- State the facts coherently and concisely at the beginning – try to write in the style of a newspaper (i.e reporting of the facts in short simple sentences).
- Follow up with an emotive quote that explains why the news is good news (or bad news!) – this is where you can be more expressive in your language.
- Any useful information should be added in as 'Notes to editors' at the end of your press release.
- Keep it short – 300-400 words max! (Not including notes to editors)
- Include contact details (email AND phone) for yourself or another member of your group so that journalists can contact you. A phone number that will be answered is vital.

Ops notes

Ops notes are essentially invites designed to alert and help the media plan ahead. Send them out two or three days before an event is due to take place to allow the outlets time to plan.

Keep them short and state simply the time, date and location of the event – plus a short description.

Include an email address and a phone number so that journalists can get in touch for further comment. Again, a phone number that will be answered is vital.

Interviews

Ensure you have at least one person available to comment when you send out a story and that they're easily contactable by phone. Journalists may follow up for a number of different reasons.

Often journalists will call for some extra facts and thoughts. They may quote you – directly or indirectly. You will likely be paraphrased in a way that reads more eloquently than you could ever have spoken in real life, so don't worry too much about phrasing!

You could also be called to give a televised or radio interview. These sound intimidating but need not be. Some top tips can be [accessed here](#). And don't hesitate to give Cycling UK a ring for a steer on key messages.

If you are called for an interview, some essential things you need to know are:

Is it pre-record or live? With pre-record it does not matter if you stumble and need to re-answer questions – all of this will be edited out.

If it is live, are you required to come into the studio or can you do it over the phone?

Will the interview involve anyone else (i.e someone who takes a different stance to you) or is it just you and the interviewer?

There is no harm in asking for the questions or subject matter beforehand. Some media outlets will share these with you.

Increasing your chances of coverage



It's obvious that not all releases are published, so don't be disheartened if your news isn't covered every time. However, there are steps you can take which can help maximise the chances of your story being covered.

Follow up on any press release or ops note by ringing up the media outlets to make sure they have received and read what you have sent them and to very gently encourage them to cover it.

A follow up call is particularly important with broadcast media that you have sent an ops note to, as they may want to come along to get pictures and do interviews. Search online for their forward planning desk or ask for it at the main switchboard.

Print media, on the other hand, can rely on a press release after the event to get all the info they need for a piece.

Link your story to a 'hook' (i.e to current events). PR companies spend a fortune creating a hook. But it could come in the form of an election / a proposal to build a new road or housing development / a piece of research / an event etc.

Include exciting and interesting photos (see below).

While you may find your campaign activity interesting, you need to consider what makes the story interesting to people who have never given a moment's thought to the benefits of cycling.

Appeal to people's emotions where possible. A bike ride is of little interest to most people but a bike ride attended by, for example, someone whose life has been turned around by cycling, may be.

Quotes or appearances from celebrities or local politicians can help you get coverage.

Photos

Photos can really help sell a story into your local papers. Do your best to engineer exciting and interesting photos. People standing in a line is not the most interesting of pictures, so try to get something a bit more lively.

Get photos of known faces. If you are at an event, make sure you capture any interesting banners/outfits. If you have arranged an event and attract a large crowd, make sure this is clearly visible.

Remember to provide a full caption including your contact details if you send a newspaper your own photos.

If you are inviting press photographers to attend, issue them with a photo call (similar to an ops note). This should include the date, time and location together with a brief explanation of what should be photographed. Always follow a photo call notice up with a phone call – including one the day before the event.

You'll often be asked whether you have the rights to these photos, so it's best to read up on the [legality of taking pictures](#) in public and private spaces.

General tips



If you have never spoken to media before, the idea can be intimidating. The reality is that they have column inches and air time to fill, so will be grateful for your correspondence if you come with an interesting story.

Remember that they receive hundreds of [emails](#) each day, so you have to stand out to get noticed. This is why follow up phone calls and catchy headlines are so necessary.

Become the local go-to expert on your topic. The more contact you have with your local journalists over a particular issue, the more likely they are to come to you as a source of information.

If you are contacted by journalist, always find out their deadline for response – don't feel that you have to give an immediate answer right there and then. However, once you have their deadline, keep to it and ideally beat it. Just as importantly is to let the journalist know in good time if you think you won't be able to help by their deadline.