

TOOLKIT FOR ACTION



REACHING THE MEDIA

When working to create change, we often want to publicise our messages as widely as possible – to demonstrate what we're doing and why we as Quakers are motivated to do it. The media is one of the best tools we can use to do this.

Getting your project or campaign covered in your local media will help you to gather support and build enthusiasm, raise awareness of an issue, and reach – or build pressure on – decision-makers.

Writing a press release

The most effective way of getting your news into the media is to send a press release to the news editors of your local newspapers, magazines and other publications, and your local TV and radio stations.

News editors receive lots of press releases every day, more than they can use. So you need to get their attention by making sure the structure and content will engage them, and that your story is new, significant and interesting.

Structure

The text should be font size 11 minimum and in simple font type. The press release should be no longer than one side of A4 (300-400 words), with line spaces between paragraphs. Try to keep sentences and paragraphs short. You might want to break up the text with bullet points. Keep facts and figures simple.

Journalists won't always follow up on a story before publishing it, so make sure you've said everything you need to. But they will sometimes get in touch for more information, or to explore a particular angle of the story. Agree within your group or meeting a press contact who will answer questions about the story.

Name of your meeting/ group

For immediate release

Date

Headline

Text in short paragraphs

Ends

For further information and photos contact: (Name, phone, email)

Notes to editors

- Include here brief bullet points providing background information.

This should always go at the bottom of the main body of text to indicate the end of the press release.

Notes might include who Quakers are, an overview of your project or campaign, or some brief facts about the issue you are writing about.



This guide sets out how to reach the media through:

- ➡ writing a press release
- ➡ sending letters
- ➡ giving a radio or TV interview.

It also outlines some general tips for getting your stories covered, and shares learning and experience from Quakers and meetings.

This guide is part of a wider set of resources on creating change, which you can find at www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/social-action-training-and-tools/toolkit-for-action-1.



Content

Being newsworthy and relevant

Before sending out a press release, be sure that what you're saying is newsworthy. What's new or unusual about it? Why will it interest other people? Wait until the right moment when you've got a good story to tell. You might, for example, write a press release about a public event, a demonstration, vigil or other action, or the launch of a new campaign or project.

Being part of a larger campaign can also make your story more interesting. Can you link your action to something happening nationally, or to a bigger campaign in your community?

Think about what kind of media you're sending it to, such as local, faith or Christian press. How can you make your story relevant to the media's particular angle?

Timing

When planning an event or action, factor in the print deadlines for your local media. Editors rarely run old news. If you can, give advance warning of a significant action by sending the dates four weeks ahead.

Photos

Try to offer photos with your press release. Photos need to be as high-quality as possible so they can be printed, and should show what you did, giving the story a human face. An engaging photo of a creative action, for example, can make your story more interesting. Try to send both a landscape and a portrait option, and send them as a .jpg file.

Sending the press release

Send the press release by email to the editor of the media you want to reach, copying it into the body of the email instead of attaching it as a Word document. In the email subject field, type 'Press release:' followed by your headline. If your headline is too long for the subject field, words may be left out, thereby altering its meaning or causing it to make little sense.

Writing the press release

- ⚙️ **Headline:** Your headline should be attention-grabbing and easily understandable – it should communicate exactly what has happened. Aim for a maximum of seven words.
- ⚙️ **The opening sentence:** You need to get the journalist's attention at the start so they read on. Put the most important information at the top, summarising your story in one or two sentences. Try to cover who, what, where, why, how and when.
- ⚙️ **Key messages:** Identify three key messages you want people to take away and build the press release around them. What will the audience learn about your project, the issue you're working on, or your faith?
- ⚙️ **Be concise and clear:** Focus on the story and your key messages. You don't need to include background information or explain the history of what's happened – this can go in your 'notes to editors'. Avoid jargon and acronyms as much as you can. If you need to use an acronym, write it out in full the first time you use it, with the acronym in brackets. Keep the press release to one side of A4.
- ⚙️ **Find a hook:** Is there something happening in the world, or your local area, that will make your news more relevant? This might be a global or national week of action on a certain issue, a local election, a controversial local plan, or symbolic date such as a Quaker anniversary. Be explicit about the link in your press release and make it early on. Use your knowledge of your local area to make the story relevant and interesting.
- ⚙️ **Make it human:** It's usually the human element of a story that makes it interesting. Balance facts and figures with personal experiences and stories.
- ⚙️ **Quotes:** Quotes should provide an angle or opinion, not more information. If you're using more than one quote, the second needs to say something different to the first. A quote should be in someone's own words and be relatively short – around 30 words. Quoting someone who is well-known in your community will increase the likelihood of your story being published.
- ⚙️ **Choose your words carefully:** Avoid words and phrases that may not be understood by non-Quakers. For instance, refer to 'Quakers' rather than 'Friends'.



If you have any personal media contacts, or someone has covered your stories before, send the release to them too. Knowing a journalist can often increase the chances of your story being covered.

It can help to follow up with a call to the news desk, though your press release should be interesting enough to get the journalist's attention and give them enough information to decide to cover the story.

It's best to send the press release first thing in the morning, or the evening before, so that a journalist sees the story when they're deciding what to cover that day.

Top tips for reaching the media

- ➔ Plan ahead with your group or meeting. Who will respond to the media? Who will write the press release and act as the contact person? How will you decide how to respond to a situation, and who will speak on behalf of the group? Would you benefit from some media training?
- ➔ Read your local newspapers and other publications to get a sense of what they're covering and their take on specific issues. This will help you tailor your press releases and letters to make them more relevant.
- ➔ Make friends with your local media! Keep a list of the journalists you know and their contact details, as well as their print deadlines. Use any personal contacts you have to help get your stories covered. If you are part of a longer-term project or campaign, work on getting the local media interested over time so they become keen to cover it at various stages.
- ➔ Be timely. Your story is much more likely to be covered if you send it out on the day something happened, or the day after at the latest.
- ➔ Don't give up if something doesn't get covered. Remember that journalists receive lots of press releases and other submissions every day, and can only cover a few of them. Keep trying and don't take it personally!



Letters to the editor

A letter to the editor is often a response to something that's been published in their publication, usually an article, column, editorial, or another letter.

The letter allows you to share your opinion on an issue or event. You might write something to support what's already been said, or to challenge it and present an alternative point of view.



Sending a letter to the editor is a good way of raising awareness about an issue in your local community, as local media are likely to cover most of the relevant letters they receive. A letter can also be used to challenge the way the media is covering a certain issue, for example if they are using stereotypes or discriminatory language.

Writing an effective letter

- ⚙️ Long letters won't usually be published so keep it short, between 200 and 250 words.
- ⚙️ As you don't have much space, you need to be concise. You're only going to be able to communicate one key message, so think carefully about what it is.
- ⚙️ Open with your key point, putting the most important information at the top. Try to cover why you're writing the letter, and the argument you're making, in the first sentence.
- ⚙️ Make it personal. The letter is about your opinion and experience – that's what makes it interesting. Be up front about what your opinion is. Are you supporting, correcting, or arguing against?
- ⚙️ Make sure it's timely and relevant. The letter is much more likely to get covered if you respond to something that's recently been printed, or link it to a current local issue.
- ⚙️ State what you think should be done, as well as what you disagree with. What would you like to see instead? Are you already doing something that's helping to create the alternative? Can you point people towards an action or project you are involved with?
- ⚙️ Provide some evidence, such as a fact or figure, if you're making a big statement about an issue.
- ⚙️ Once you've written the letter, go back through it and remove any superfluous words. Also check the tone, particularly if you feel strongly about the issue – will it bring people with you, or might it alienate them?

Structure and sending

Start the letter with 'Dear Editor' and be clear about what you're responding to, stating the title of the piece you're talking about and the date it was published.

Copy the text of your letter into the body of the email, and put your name, telephone number, email address and home address at the bottom.

You might be able to find an email contact for the letters page on the media's website. If you can't, send it to the editor.

You could also send the letter to your local MP or another appropriate decision-maker to make them aware of the issue or your opinion.

Preparing for a radio or TV interview

Being interviewed on radio or TV can be a nerve-wracking experience, but it's a great way to share your messages and what you're doing with a wider audience.

Everyone is able to give a good interview – it's simply through practice and experience that we become more relaxed and confident. If you're involved in a project or taking action you want the media to cover, make some time early on to practise giving interviews in your group or meeting. Have a go at answering



questions such as, 'what's the project about?', 'why are you doing it?', 'what do you hope to achieve?', and 'why are Quakers involved?', and give each other feedback.

Things to know before the interview

- ★ Ask the radio or TV station: where and how long the interview will be; what sort of questions you will be asked; who will be interviewing you; if someone else will be interviewed at the same time, and if so, who; and if it will be live or pre-recorded. Also ask the interviewer or station how you will be introduced and what the first question will be – this will help to put you at ease.
- ★ Think beforehand about what you want the interview to achieve. Who will be listening, and what do you want them to hear? Prepare three key messages you want to convey during the interview, bearing in mind that a listener will probably take away only one or two points.
- ★ Prepare a short summary that introduces the project or issue concisely, in a couple of sentences.
- ★ Be ready to tell some anecdotes or human stories about the issue.
- ★ Practise answering some challenging questions about the issue you're working on or the type of project you're involved with. This might include responding to arguments commonly used against the campaign.
- ★ Is there anything you don't want to say during the interview? Everything said should be considered 'on the record'. Prepare answers to any difficult questions that may arise.



During the interview

- ★ In answer to the first question, make clear what motivates Quakers to get involved with the issue you're addressing.
- ★ Speak slowly to help listeners follow what you're saying. If it's a TV interview, try to sit still and make eye contact with the interviewer, as moving around can distract the audience. Don't look into the camera unless you've been asked to.
- ★ Use simple, clear, common-sense language. Assume the audience knows little or nothing about the issue or Quakers. Don't try to convey lots of complicated facts, and remember that facts won't win people over. Make it personal by speaking about your own or someone else's experience, and tell human stories to make the issue real to listeners.
- ★ Be yourself! You'll sound more confident and convincing if you use your own words, rather than trying to use other people's phrases.
- ★ If the questions aren't allowing you to talk about your key messages, steer the conversation back to what you want to focus on. Make sure you briefly address the question, or reframe it by using phrases like, 'I think the real question is...'. Then use a linking sentence to bring the conversation back to your key message.
- ★ It's okay to pause before answering a question and to stop when you feel you've answered it. It's not your job to fill the space. Don't worry if you stumble on a word or phrase, just keep going – the listener probably won't notice.
- ★ If other people being interviewed at the same time are presenting a different opinion, don't get drawn into a heated argument. Present your view point calmly and clearly.
- ★ After the interview, sit still and remain silent, as microphones and cameras might still be running.



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Quaker Equality Week – Manchester & Warrington Area Meeting

In March 2015 Manchester & Warrington Area Meeting organised Quaker Equality Week, to bear witness to our testimony to equality, in the face of increasing disparities in levels of income and wealth in the UK. More than 80 meetings took part, targeting the general public, politicians and the media to raise awareness of this issue both among and beyond Friends.

Silent vigils and public displays in community spaces all played a key role in publicising the week. Lots of meetings were successful in getting their local newspaper to highlight the campaign and some Friends were interviewed on local radio. The week was even featured on ‘Thought for the Day’ on BBC Radio Scotland, helping to spread the message even wider.

Here the coordinators of Quaker Equality Week offer some helpful tips on reaching the media:

- ✿ Publicity both outside and within Quakers is very important. Spend as much time and energy on publicising any activity as you do on organising the activity.
- ✿ Personal contact is the best form of publicity. But also use emails, social media, items in area meeting newsletters, press releases – there are many ways to publicise. Think about how to do it, and do it as widely as possible.
- ✿ Make sure your MP and parliamentary candidates are aware of your activities.

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Why do we have
food banks
in a **rich**
country?



Lancaster Quakers holding their second vigil as part of Quaker Equality Week. Photo credit: Philip Deegan

Produced by Manchester & Warrington
Social Justice Group for Quaker Equality Week



A poster produced for Quaker Equality Week. Photo credit:
Manchester & Warrington Social Justice Group

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