



ROTARY PUBLIC RELATIONS GUIDE

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WELCOME TO THE ROTARY PUBLIC RELATIONS GUIDE

Publicity is essential to telling Rotary's story. By getting your club's activities promoted in your local news, you increase your community's understanding of Rotary and strengthen our ability to improve lives around the world.

In this guide you'll find tips, templates, and best practices for developing an effective public relations campaign. As a result, you will:

- Show Rotary's impact and value in your community
- Cultivate relationships with journalists and employ the right tactics and tools to get media coverage
- Clearly convey your message during interviews
- Manage, and respond effectively to, media inquiries during a crisis



ROTARY AS A NEWS SOURCE

As business and professional leaders who have a passion for taking action to improve communities at home and abroad, Rotary members offer journalists a unique viewpoint, along with access to people and information they want to cover.

You can get your club's activities the media attention they deserve by submitting well-written, relevant, and compelling media pitches. Consider the following when you're developing your pitch for your media contacts:

- **News hook:** Does your story relate to current events, trends, or observances? For instance, stories about how your club responded to a natural disaster or how it's celebrating World Polio Day make good news hooks.
- **Timeliness:** News about upcoming, ongoing, or recently completed club events or projects.
- **Proximity:** News that pertains to issues, people, or events in the community that the media coverage would reach.
- **Prominence:** News that involves local public figures, including elected officials, business leaders, and media personalities.
- **Human interest:** News that elicits an emotional response. For example, stories about families who benefited from your club's food project or homeless children who attend a school your club helped build.
- **Visually compelling:** Dramatic, action-oriented images that visually tell your story. For example, images of children drinking clean water from a well your club built or a member vaccinating a child against polio.
- **Supporting data:** Statistics and research that support your story and demonstrate your project's impact on the community.



GETTING STARTED

WORKING WITH JOURNALISTS

Building relationships with journalists and being a knowledgeable and trusted resource on issues that affect your community — even when Rotary is not the focus — can lead to more coverage of your club's projects and events.

GET TO KNOW THE REPORTERS IN YOUR AREA

Develop a media list that includes journalists' names, contact details, and titles, along with the topics they cover. This will streamline your media outreach and allow you to quickly find the journalists who are best suited for your story. Include local bloggers and social media influencers, as well as any feedback you receive that may help you in the future.

Larger newspapers or broadcast stations may have reporters who specialize in certain topics, such as business, features, medical news, event calendars, or education. A business writer may be interested in your club's career day for students or a microloan project; an education writer may want to interview an exchange student or Rotary Peace Fellow; feature writers are best for club member profiles; and a health reporter may want to cover your club's support for ending polio.

TIPS FOR WORKING WITH JOURNALISTS

- **Approach journalists strategically.** Pitch only stories that align with a reporter's publication and the topics it covers. Reporters are more likely to read and respond to your email when you send them stories that resonate with their readers.
- **Use the reporter's preferred method to submit story ideas.** Some journalists accept ideas by email only. Others prefer a phone call. Find out your reporter's preference. When in doubt, send an email first.
- **Understand their constraints and publication schedules.** Reporters often have tight schedules and need story details and accompanying materials right away. Have photos, videos, statistics, project and background data, and any other helpful material available.
- **Respond promptly to inquiries.** An opportunity you're offered could disappear if you fail to reply in time.

- **Take advantage of unexpected meetings.** Like you, journalists have social lives. When your paths cross outside of business, take the opportunity to introduce yourself and exchange contact information. Offer to send the journalist information about how Rotary members are taking action to improve communities across the globe.
- **Engage media in your club events.** Invite journalists to club meetings that feature speakers who address topics that they cover. Or invite them to participate in a project, event, or other Rotary activity.

THE STORY PITCH

When you first contact a reporter about a story:

- **Make sure the story is newsworthy** and relevant to the news organization's audience.
- **Be informative but concise.** Plan what you'll say before you contact the reporter.
- **Follow up**, but be careful about the number of times you call or email. As a general rule:
 - **Email first.** Email is best for initial contact so a reporter can process the most relevant information. Put the news release in the body of your email with a short note above it. Reporters' email addresses can usually be found on their publication's website or on their most recent stories.
 - **Call second.** If you do not receive a response, call to follow up. If you get voicemail, leave a message and allow 24 to 48 hours before following up again.
 - **Recap third.** If you don't connect with a reporter before the event, you still have an opportunity to promote Rotary. Send a message about the event's successes: fundraising goal, event photos, and milestones.
- **Share published stories on social media.** And be sure to post them on your club website and send them to your Rotary public image coordinator.

WHEN A REPORTER DECLINES TO COVER YOUR STORY

If a reporter isn't interested in your story, accept the journalist's decision, but make sure to keep their information for future opportunities. This story may not be a good fit, but that doesn't mean the next story will be rejected. Arguing with reporters only alienates them and will hurt your chances of having future stories published.

TYPES OF EDITORIAL CONTENT

In addition to contacting a journalist directly, you can create interest in your club's activities and events by using news releases, letters to the editor, and opinion pieces. Learn more about each of these types of editorial content.

NEWS RELEASE

The purpose of a news release, also called a press release, is to get the media to report on an organization and to seek additional information. Write a news release to promote a specific club event, accomplishment, or significant activity, such as a service project or dedication.

Give the key details: who, what, where, when, and why. Reporters want to know the basics right away. For instance, if you're promoting an event, include the following in your news release:

- Event host and attendees
- Topic and purpose (and why it's important)
- Date and time
- Location and registration information
- Contact information

News releases should be one page and written in the third person. Creative and compelling openings draw interest in your event, but you want your first sentence to be concise and direct.

Download sample news releases by going to the [Brand Center](#) and typing "Public Relations Resources" in the search box on the upper right-hand corner of the screen.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The editorial page is one of the most read sections of the newspaper and is a great place to reach a large, diverse audience. If published, letters provide a starting point for discussion, news coverage, and potential support for an event, such as funding polio vaccinations or support for a Rotary project. Letters to the editor can also be used to comment on or correct earlier news coverage.

- **Keep it short and simple.** Check your local paper for guidelines, but typically, letters are no more than 200-250 words.
- **Focus on one key message,** and make sure to state your point clearly in your first sentence.
- **Include references.** If you respond to a recent news article, previous letter, editorial, or news event, refer to it by date and headline.
- **Support your stance.** Start with a background sentence or two, state your position, and end by suggesting what the reader can do to help. If they're available, use facts or figures to support your position.
- **Be transparent.** Newspapers and magazines won't publish anonymous letters. Be sure to include all contact information that the newspaper asks for. If in doubt, check its website.
- **Follow policies.** Newspapers and magazines publish their submission policies. Review these requirements before submitting your letter.

Download sample letters to the editor by going to the [Brand Center](#) and typing "Public Relations Resources" in the search box on the upper right-hand corner of the screen.

OPINION PIECE

Opinion pieces written by experts offer readers diverse opinions on timely news issues and community concerns, and often include substantial factual information, too. Most relate to an issue in recent news, but they can also provide a fresh opinion or suggested course of action.

To maximize the likelihood that your opinion piece will be published:

- **Share.** If you have a compelling personal story or real-life example that relates to Rotary and will resonate emotionally with readers, consider including it.
- **Be concise.** Don't use Rotary jargon or vague or institutional wording. Write as if you were talking to your neighbor.
- **Edit.** Proofread your final draft to make certain it doesn't contain any grammatical or spelling errors.
- **Check the newspaper's policies.** Many won't accept opinion pieces longer than 600 words or those that have been submitted to another publication at the same time.
- **Submit and follow up.** If several days pass without any response, contact the editor to see if your piece is under consideration. Ask if you can revise it to improve its chances of being published.

See an [example of an opinion piece](#).



MEDIA INTERVIEW TIPS

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

- **Prepare.** Develop one or two main points that you want to communicate. Rehearse what you want to say. Anticipate difficult questions, and prepare positive responses.
- **Know the media.** Know the basics about the media outlet (its focus and audience) and the reporter (look for bylines) before the interview.
- **Provide the reporter with background materials,** including a short biography of the person to be interviewed, beforehand.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

- **Answer at the top.** Answer questions first, and if necessary, transition to the point you really want to make. Even if a reporter asks a negative question, answer honestly without repeating the negative statement. Then steer the conversation to your main point.
- **Avoid the question-answer syndrome.** Don't let the reporter lead you through the interview. Keep control over your message. Use most questions as openings for opportunities to tell your story.
- **Emphasize your main points.** Reinforce your message through a technique called "flagging," using simple phrases such as "the key point is" or "most important." Repetition is another way to emphasize your key messages.
- **Prepare for difficult questions.** Consider the following techniques:
 - **Deflecting:** "It's too early to address that."
 - **Bridging:** ABC: answer or acknowledge; then "bridge" and communicate. "That was several years ago. Today we focus on..."
 - **Broadening:** "This is a societal issue."
- **Be articulate and concise.** Present the facts in a simple, direct manner. If a reporter's question is unclear, ask for clarification.

- **Maintain boundaries.** Don't over-explain or go off topic. Keep the interview focused on your message.
- **Be engaging.** Vary your voice, pacing, body language, and facial expressions.
- **Prepare quotes or soundbites.** Use colorful statements, compelling phrasing, and active verbs.
- **Speak in personal terms whenever possible.** Using personal anecdotes to illustrate your point is the most effective way to communicate your message.
- **Avoid jargon.** Rotary terms like "district" or "district governor" can be meaningless and confusing to people outside of Rotary, so avoid them. If you have to use Rotary phrases, explain them. Avoid using the term "Rotarians"; instead, use "Rotary club members" or "members of Rotary."
- **Use metaphors and analogies.** Provide comparisons and examples that make facts and figures vivid.
- **Remember that you are never truly "off the record."** Everything you say may be included in the story. Stay in interview mode whenever a reporter is present.
- **Remember your audience.** Make comments that will interest readers or viewers.

TELEVISION INTERVIEWS

- Speak and gesture naturally.
- Use short sentences.
- Talk to the interviewer, not to the camera. Treat the interview as a conversation.
- Keep a positive expression. Smile when appropriate.
- Avoid wearing clothing with busy patterns, which can distract the viewer.



WHEN A CRISIS OCCURS

During times of crisis, handling media inquiries and taking proactive approaches to communicate with the public are crucial for protecting the reputation of the organization. Be ready to respond by following the tips outlined in the Media Crisis Guide, which you can find by going to the **Brand Center** and typing “Public Relations Resources” in the search box on the upper right-hand corner of the screen. You can also contact Rotary International Public Relations staff at +1-847-866-3466 or pr@rotary.org for assistance.



RESOURCES

Want sample materials? Go to the **Brand Center** and type “Public Relations Resources” in the search box on the upper right-hand corner of the screen. The following templates are available for download:

- News releases
 - Polio immunization trip
 - Outstanding member
 - Fundraising event
 - Service project
- Media advisories
 - Polio fundraiser
 - Events
- Letters to the editor
 - Peace
 - Membership
- Media Crisis Guide