



Media Guidelines for UNV

In a rapid and digital-driven media environment, it is important for the Communications Section at HQ to equip all personnel with some basic guidance on how to deal with the media. No matter what you do at UNV or where you are stationed, potentially there will be interaction with the media in some shape or form.

The first and most important thing to know is: when you are approached by the media, contact your communications focal point or unv.media@unv.org for guidance, clearance and advise.

You should obtain permission before approaching the news media or responding to their enquiries. You should be aware of who they are, what they want and make a deliberate decision about whether you will engage with them. If you are unsure, don't hesitate to stop talking, and be in touch with us before you go ahead.

Always be professional. Do not use a media opportunity to express your personal views. Don't guess the answer to a question, or enter speculation. Be clear, consistent, honest and brief. Decide in advance what you want to say. Stick to your core theme and do not be drawn into a discussion on issues that are not your area of specialization or responsibility.

Most journalists are motivated to tell a good story. They may be friendly and professional, or they may be aggressive and unethical. Treat all journalists in a professional manner and remain calm. If you have permission to talk, you will decide whether to answer questions. It is also up to you to decide when to stop.

Permissions

Ensure that you respect the relevant clearance procedures for your UN Agency and location, and never disclose confidential information. Individual UN Volunteers should seek prior approval for these activities from their UNV Programme Officer / Programme Manager. The PO/PM will approach the office of the Resident Representative / Resident Coordinator or the SRSG. If you intend to make a public statement on behalf of a host agency, you need to seek approval from the country head of that Agency. Programme Officers / Programme Managers should seek support from their assigned

communications focal point in Bonn and provide them with notice of any media contact.

Press releases

The purposes of a press release

To obtain coverage by the news media. Decide why you want media to cover your 'news'. Is it in order to generate awareness, or encourage people to take some sort of action? This can affect why and how you approach the news media. Your correspondence should address the interests of your audience (see below), rather than reflect your own motivations.

To obtain exposure be clear who your ultimate audience is. For example, decision-makers or potential volunteers. This should be reflected in the type of story you tell, examples you use, the sophistication of your messages, and the type of news media you use.

Some media releases are unlikely to gain significant media attention, because they are drafted for the interest of a very narrow audience, such as a donor or programme partner. Avoid using a media release when alternative formats would be more suitable, such as a letter or report.

Audiences

News media (print, broadcast, online): Your primary audience is the news media. Your 'sales pitch' should reflect their interests and requirements. News media like novelty (what is 'new' about your story?) and they value clarity (it should be obvious what you are talking about – what the media release wants to achieve). News professionals always want the answer to these basic questions: who, where, what, when, how and why.

Stakeholders: These are people that you need to communicate with, such as a local populace, civic leaders, politicians, or highly specific audiences (see niche audiences, below). Always bear in mind your ultimate audience. Although your media release needs to be of interest to journalists and editors, it should remain meaningful for the final recipient. It can be useful to have background information available, or a list of relevant contacts, if your audience needs further details.

Niche audiences: Your audience might be very specific, e.g. limited to your programme or location, or to a specific industry. Consider this when choosing your news media. If you have a choice, focus on the most suitable media (e.g. it may be better to spend your efforts talking to a

journalist from a niche publication, rather than sending the release to media that will not be interested).

Broader public: If you are not running a large public information campaign, then the general public is probably not your key audience. However, your niche audiences possibly also access some form of mass media, and general media coverage can support of your targeted communications. For example, a news item in a major newspaper can reinforce information that you circulate elsewhere (on a website, in a leaflet or through workshops, etc.).

Content

Remember the 'news pyramid'. Always start your story with the most important information, and put details towards the end. Aim to capture attention quickly, then explain.

Keep your media release focused on two or three key messages. A media release need not tell the whole story in great detail, especially if you intend to follow up with further information, or to solicit interviews, etc.

Try to find an illustration for your story, such as a photo, diagram or logo. When talking to TV journalists (or researchers) you should be able to describe the visual information available, e.g. people, places and action shots, or any old footage.

Have evidence to support your claim and be ready to provide supporting documents if needed. Mention any relevant website, and provide the name of a contact person who is able to discuss the story (and make sure they are fully briefed).

Timing

Always plan well in advance. If you want attendance at an event, send your invitations/notifications at least one week in advance.

Media releases can be sent in advance of an official release date, with an 'embargo' until a specific time and date (Word of caution – be prepared in case anyone breaks the embargo).

Beware of deadlines and quiet times, including public holidays. Generally, it is better to send a release to media at the start of the week than at the end. However, take note

of the schedules of weekly and monthly publications, and the daily timeframes for newswires and TV and radio shows. A slow news day can be helpful. If a major issue (scandal, disaster) has occurred, your item may not be covered unless it has some bearing (be careful of taking advantage of such circumstances: keep it relevant to your programme goals and UNV's objectives).

In the search for novelty, news media may not cover an item if it has been covered elsewhere. Think of different angles you can provide to different media.

Consider releasing first to newspapers (or magazines), or to the media outlet with the biggest audience (i.e. which media will reach decision-makers, or potential volunteers, etc.).

If you do not officially deal with the public media, you may need prior approval before giving any information to the media, which can include public speaking engagements, interviews, statements to the press and articles published in print and online. Seek prior approval from the head of the office, such as the Resident Representative / Resident Coordinator or SRSG. Ensure that you respect the relevant clearance procedures. All this takes time.

Follow-up

Call the news editor to sell your story. Try to speak to a journalist assigned to the story (or a specialist in your sector). Be prepared to explain why it is a good story: e.g. unique issues, the personalities involved, or any relationship to other news items you have seen.

Send copies of your media release directly to your partners and other key stakeholders. Don't rely on the news media to relay or translate your story!

Be ready for any enquiries with background information and a spokesperson who is knowledgeable and can be quoted as a representative, if appropriate.

If you see or hear an error in a news report, use this as an opportunity for clarification and re-stating your key messages. If the error is serious you should alert headquarters to the issue. In the case of simple misunderstandings, use the error as an opportunity to explain yourself more clearly to the journalist. Try to offer some new information so that the journalist can develop a new story, incorporating the correct information. Also consider whether your own communications could be improved to eliminate this misunderstanding in future. Don't antagonize the journalist or develop any animosity. Remain calm!

Circulate copies of media reports to your colleagues and stakeholders, with comments if needed (e.g. for clarification or correction). Keep a record of any media coverage; this can be useful background information for a new journalist and for your successor.

Beware: most journalists – but not all – are reputable and professional. No matter their moral status, every journalist is loyal in the first instance to their publication. Never expect something to be confidential or ‘off the record’. Always present a professional and informed position, or forward the query to a more senior colleague who is prepared to handle a media enquiry.

Media coverage

Before sending a media release to the press, get the green light first from Communications at UNV HQ and/or UNDP office.

Involve concerned civil society information officers who can post volunteering activities on their organizational websites or include them in their regular newsletters.

Document your plans and report on the outcomes. Send reports, stories, photos, speeches, and other materials to your communications focal point at HQ.

Opinion Editorials / Op-Eds

Before you start, do you:

- Have something to say which is linked to a news event or story?
- Have enough time to write, edit and get the op-ed signed off before the event or story is over?
- Have an argument to make?
- Know who your audience is?
- Have an idea of where you want the op-ed to be placed? Know what you want this op-ed to achieve?

If the answer to any of these is no, then please rethink whether you should do this op-ed.

Writing the op-ed:

- Length should be around 700 words but each media outlet will have a different length they prefer – check this first before you write it. Don't write far more words than needed and then expect that someone else can cut or edit it down.

- There should be strong, accessible comment.
- Avoid jargon.
- Op-eds always work best if they contain (and lead with) a strong, tight argument, which is then illustrated and developed in the text that follows.
- They also work best if written by one person. Group writing usually leads to an op-ed that is not strong and generally hard to publish.
- Don't forget to hyperlink facts and figures and add links to UNV web pages when possible.

Placing the op-ed:

UNV HQ or UNDP HQ cannot pitch op-eds that have not been agreed in advance.

You must inform your communication focal point before pitching an op-ed to an international media target as other op-eds might already be in the process. UNV's reputation is harmed by unorganized pitching and future placement can be put at risk.

Most newspapers need the op-ed several days in advance.

There are limited media outlets that take op-eds. Influential international newspapers are particularly difficult to get into as there is so much competition. Outlets focusing on development issues may be easier to get into.

You cannot offer an op-ed to more than one media organization at a time. If they are going to run an op-ed, it will be an exclusive (although it is possible and preferable to publish it in different languages).

Q&As (internal)

A media Q&A is an internal document which can be drawn upon to answer questions from audiences such as journalists, social media audiences and the public.

The Q&A aims to answer all questions which might be asked on a particular topic, including difficult questions which we hope we will not be asked. It is good practice to prepare these questions and answers in advance as a "no comment" to the media rarely looks good.

A Q&A is not to be distributed in public in full, and would not be posted on a website (unless edited for that purpose).

Useful Links

<https://www.unv.org/branding/tools>

<https://intranet.undp.org/unit/pb/communicate/SitePages/Media%20Relations.aspx>

http://www.navedu.navy.mi.th/stg/databasestory/data/laukniyom/workjob/bigcountry-workjob/UN-Publications/062-sgs_media_guidelines_for_united_nations_offici.pdf