

# How To Write A News Release

## Cambridge Public Health Department

### General Guidelines

- ▶ **Length:** A news release should be about 200 to 400 words (not including “addendum” text)
- ▶ **Decide on a contact person.** Who will get the calls from the media?
- ▶ **How to start.** First, list all the information you want to include. Then arrange the information in order of importance. The most important information should come first.
- ▶ **Keep it simple!** Make sure that your press release only covers one topic, one concept, and one story. Too many concepts are confusing to editors and readers.
- ▶ **Keep sentences short.** About 20 words to a sentence.
- ▶ **Keep paragraphs short.** About 4 to 5 lines each.
- ▶ **Translate jargon and technical terms** into everyday language. If this is not possible, clearly explain all technical terms and write out the full name of all acronyms (e.g., Massachusetts Department of Public Health, rather than “DPH”).
- ▶ **Don’t use “we” or “our”** – Always use the “third person” in news releases and other formal writing. For example, “The Cambridge Public Health Department eradicated malaria yesterday,” *not* “We eradicated malaria” or “Our department eradicated malaria.”
- ▶ **Use of quotes.** When you use a quote, don’t repeat information that’s covered elsewhere in the release. Use your quotes as a “bully pulpit” to convey an action step, assess risk, or advocate for an issue. The quote can voice emotion or an opinion.
- ▶ **Accuracy.** Make sure your information is up-to-date and accurate.
- ▶ **Addendum text:** When relevant, include at the end of the release a short explanatory paragraph about the program(s) and/or primary organization you’re writing about. This is boilerplate information that will help the reporter better understand the programs and people discussed in the release. Include the mission or goals of the program or organization. If the press research is about a research study, include a short bio(s) of the author(s) you’re trying to promote. These paragraphs should not be part of the main body text.

*Sources: Suzy Feinberg (CPHD) and The Publicity Handbook (2001)*