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# Voluntary **Action** Islington

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## Championing your cause & getting your message across



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**A GUIDE TO SHARING YOUR SUCCESSES AND  
ACHIEVEMENTS**



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## Promoting your community organisation

Taking the time to promote your community group effectively can offer many practical benefits:

- it can help you attract more members and volunteers
- it can lead to better relations with others in the community
- it can raise your profile and standing in the local community
- it might help with getting funding
- it motivates the group and also shows others that you are doing something.

However, before you rush into publicising and promoting your community group and what it does, you will need to give some thought to:

- what information/messages do you want to communicate?
- who do you want to get your message across to? who is your target audience?
- how can you reach these people and what are the best ways of doing this?
- what do you want the result to be, e.g. attracting greater community involvement, raising awareness of a particular local issue?
- what resources do you have to put into promoting your group – perhaps you have artistic volunteers or ones who are competent on computers, access to cheap photocopying facilities, or contacts at local newspapers.

The answers to these questions will then give you a clearer idea of the steps you need to take and which practical ways of publicising your group will prove to be the most useful.

### **So do some research! Find out:**

- what local publications and newsletters exist
- what noticeboards are in your local area
- who else regularly puts out information locally
- what other services/facilities could help you with distributing or displaying your publicity e.g. schools, GP surgeries or health centres, community centres, post offices, local shops and businesses, housing offices, sports or social clubs, libraries or the mobile library service etc.
- do any of your group have contacts that could be useful?
- where do existing groups and organisations get together
- which local groups and organisations regularly get positive coverage in local papers or on local radio and how do they do it.

Many community groups give one person on the committee, or a volunteer, the overall responsibility for dealing with publicity and promotion. Other groups find that it is a significant workload that requires input from more than one person and form a publicity sub-committee. Either way, it is essential that regular updates on activity are given at committee meetings so that everyone is aware

what is happening. It is also worth exploring whether there are opportunities for you to work with other local groups in jointly promoting what you are doing and share the work and the benefits.

It is definitely worth investing some serious time in promoting your group and telling people about your successes. Often you only really see the benefits if you keep plugging away at it and keep up a steady flow of information and publicity material. Unfortunately many community groups can experience the downsides of promotion, particularly in the local press – their activities are only publicised when there is something negative or damaging to report. It is also an ongoing task that doesn't have a natural end of "we've done publicity, so what's next?"

## **Practical publicity materials:**

- word-of-mouth – use your management committee, volunteers, members, local councillors and MPs, community workers in the locality, the wider community, and other local community and voluntary sector networks to spread the word about what you are doing.
- leaflets – should be attractive with an eye-catching cover. They don't have to be professionally produced – often the most effective leaflets are cheap and cheerful. Do make the content interesting and to the point. Don't overload them with unnecessary information and be clear about what people can gain from getting involved with your group or service. Do think in advance how you are going to distribute them – are there sufficient volunteers to drop them to every community venue? You can also think about distributing them online.
- posters – should be short and snappy, eye-catching and visually stimulating. They should not include anything but the most essential information, which can be picked up instantly by your target audience. Don't forget to include a contact number for further information.
- displays – are there events taking place in your area where you could have a display stand or exhibition?
- newsletters – many groups produce their own community newsletter which can be a very useful means of keeping people informed. However, paper newsletters often take lots of time to produce unless you have lots of material readily available. An online newsletter would be a better option. You also need to be sure that you can actually keep it going for a period of time before you begin producing it. Another option might be to find out what newsletters are produced by other agencies (e.g. Councils for Voluntary Service newsletters, local authority news sheets) and submit articles about your work every so often or negotiate to have a regular slot or column in their publication.
- press releases – many groups get lots of publicity from being featured in local newspapers and on local radio stations. One of the major benefits of this form of publicity is that it's free!
- events and meetings – tap into local networks and forums, many of which have slots for sharing and exchanging information.
- website presence – this method of promotion is very common, so this will require you to ensure that people know about your website.

As mentioned above many groups find it valuable to strike up positive relationships with local newspapers and radio. So what do you need to tell them to grab their attention?

## Telling stories

**Simple stories with people at their heart can strengthen your organisation and attract supporters to your cause.**

A good story is:

- **simple:** it doesn't try to cover too many bases
- **short:** no more than a minute long, easy to remember, no script needed
- **active:** the story is about doing things
- **true:** telling a true story is a chance to talk honestly about the organisation
- told for a **purpose**.

Good stories feature:

- a strong **character:** a person at the centre who we care about
- a **turning point:** a change or resolution

### Think about your audience

When telling a story, always **start by thinking about the audience**. Ask yourself **why they should be interested and what you want them to do** as a result of hearing your story.

### The key ingredients of a news story

Various elements ensure a story makes it into the media.

- human interest – celebrities/underdogs
- scandal and conflict – sex/money/abuse of power
- conflict
- relevance – tying in to topical social, cultural and political debates
- extremes and the unusual – the first, the last, the biggest, the smallest.

### What can make my story newsworthy?

- **timely and topical** - if you can make a story timely and related to the news agenda then it has a much better chance of gaining coverage;
- **evidence-based** - having a robust evidence base can help strengthen a story;
- **case studies** - strong case studies can make or break a story;
- **a strong call to action** - in addition to evidence and case studies, think about what your organisation is calling for.

## The Press Release

The media receive thousands of press releases every day. These tips should give yours the best chance to being seen and acted on.

### 1. What's the story

News needs to have **the 'ooh ahh' factor** – tell you something you did not know, something surprising or something that is new.

### 2. The crucial details

Don't forget to add: date you sent out the press release, any embargo, your contact details.

### 3. The content of the release

After the date, embargo details and your headline, set out the body of your press release:

- Get to the point of the story straight away
- Expand on your story with more details – who, what, when, where and why
- Include a quote from a spokesperson
- Make your call to action
- Include details of a case study to illustrate the impact/ the need/ the achievement
- Ends' marks the end of your press release
- Provide contact details for you/ your communications team
- 'Notes to editors' is your space to provide more necessary detail about your organisation and the issue you are highlighting, so it does not clutter up the release itself

### 4. Check it is relevant

Make sure your story is relevant for the audience. Is it happening in their 'patch'? Do you have a case study?

### 5. Sending your release out

Copy your press release and put it into the body of an email. Don't send it as an attachment. Think about a good the subject line of your email. If you are sending it out to lots of people at the same time, send the release to yourself and blind cc all the other recipients.

### 6. Following up

Don't ask a journalist if they have seen your release. Aim instead for a little bit of conversation - is it in their diary? Would they like to speak to a case study or a spokesperson?

### 7. Keep track

Keep a record of who you have sent your press release to and what their response is.

## 8. Beyond the press release

Watch key websites relevant to your sector and look for opportunities to contribute editorial or comment. Share your organisation's expertise on professional networks, offer spokespeople for online Q&A's and get involved in social media conversations.

*Tip: Refer to your template press release for an easy to follow example*

### General tips for local media

- **Keep it local** - use local case studies or have some local statistics
- **Spokespeople** - any well-known local personalities, a local MP or councillor might be appropriate
- **The local man who made it national** - there's nothing that local media loves better than the story of a local resident who has made it onto the national stage.
- **The Borough on the national stage** - does your story/report compare this area with others?
- **Pictures** – a strong photo is useful when pitching to local newspapers.
- **Which journalists?** Send stories to the relevant journalist if possible. For those without journalists covering specialist topics, send to an individual reporter AND the main newsdesk.

## Social Media

### "Social media is not for me"

- **"You need to be very IT literate"** - social media outlets are simple to use. Start with Twitter, it is easy to set up and use. Check how to start and use account on [wikihow.com](http://www.wikihow.com).
- **"It is going to cost for not much return"** - most sites are free to use and set up. Followers will come slowly at first, stick with it and you'll find yourself reaching more people.
- **"I don't have the time"** - it will take time but if it is going to help you connect with people and / or raise money, isn't it worth it?
- **"I need to get it right first time"** – **it is all about trial and error. See what works for you.**



## Social networking – best practice

### Choose your network carefully

There are a lot of networks out there and it's easy to spend a huge amount signing up to different ones, creating numerous profiles. The most important thing is to choose outlets that are relevant to your audience and that serve your purpose.

### Which sites to use for which activities

The table below shows some common activities and suggestions for which social media sites could be used.

Your aim	Outlets to consider
To attract donations	Facebook, Twitter, YouTube
To show progress/demonstrate impact	Facebook, YouTube
To share knowledge & communicate success	Blogging, Twitter, Facebook
To alert people of events or activities	Facebook, Eventbrite, Twitter, Mailchimp
To build communities	Facebook, Twitter
To evaluate success and gain feedback	Survey Monkey
To recruit staff, network with funders and professionals	LinkedIn

### Know your audience

Choose networks that your target audience uses and think carefully about how they interact with the networks they're on. Focus your activities on what your audience will want to interact with.

### Build an effective profile

Make sure your organisation's profile is relevant, up to date and interesting. Check other organisations' profile to see best practice.

A few key things to remember:

- **keep it brief** - the description of what your organisation does should to the point
- **lead with your expertise** - you want people to know you're leaders in your field
- **use a strong photo** - if you're a campaigning organisation, use an image to reflect what you do. If you've got an iconic logo, stick with that.

## **Contribute to the social networking community**

You must respond, share, like or comment on what you read, watch and hear. The two-way process builds a dialogue with your followers.

To maximise your presence on a social networking website, you have to contribute to the community. Keep your profile up to date, share relevant information, post comments, and engage in civil debate.

## **Timing is everything**

The most effective social networkers respond and comment. Keep an eye on 'trending topics' and make comments on them if they're relevant to your agenda or might be of interest to your followers.

## **Don't overshare**

There is nothing more irritating than organisations or individuals posting too much information – often on topics that are of no interest to their audiences. Remember, make sure all posts are:

- relevant
- timely
- brief

## **Invite feedback**

Remember when using social media you're asking your followers to interact with you. Use these outlets as an opportunity to test opinion – you could even link to a short online survey if you want to gather some specific data from your key audiences.

## **Link, link and link again!**

If you use other social networking sites, make sure you include links to each of them so that they're all connected.

If someone blogs or tweets something interesting then link to it via your social media networks. Not only will this be valuable to your followers, but it'll help build connections.

## The 'no time' guide to social media



### **Think about what you're trying to achieve**

Consider what your organisation hopes to achieve through social media. Have a read of your business plan to find out where you are going as an organisation and think about how social media can help get you there.



### **Pick your social network(s)**

Refer to the grid above (Fig.1) and check how your competitor organisations (and their supporters) are using them. Different social networks are good for different things so pick the ones that fit best with what you're trying to do and ignore or delete the others.

A good, standard combination of social networks is Facebook and Twitter. If you're an organisation that generates or receives a lot of video or images, then you may want to add Pinterest or YouTube as well.



### **Find out what else your organisation is up to**

Social media is not something that thrives in a vacuum: it's best used as one part of your marketing/ fundraising/ communications. Mark these other activities down on your calendar and think about how you can use social media to support these activities, and when.



### **Don't be bullied**

Social media can be very demanding. If you're worried that people expect an immediate answer to something posted on Facebook wall or tweet to you, then put a note in your Twitter bio or Facebook 'About' which explains that the account isn't monitored 24/7.



### **Monitor how you're doing**

Invest 15 minutes every week on looking back at how your social media efforts have gone, and use that information to decide what to develop or tweak.

## Local Media

Islington Gazette	<a href="http://www.islingtongazette.co.uk/contact-us#news">http://www.islingtongazette.co.uk/contact-us#news</a>
Islington Tribune	<a href="http://islingtontribune.com/">http://islingtontribune.com/</a>
Islington Life	<a href="http://islingtonlife.london/">http://islingtonlife.london/</a>

## Peer Support & Organisations

Media Trust	Matches media professionals with groups in a “speed dating” style environment	<a href="https://mediatrust.org/communications-support/access-media-volunteers/">https://mediatrust.org/communications-support/access-media-volunteers/</a>
	Do Something Brilliant campaign – video production workshops for community organisations	<a href="http://www.mediatrust.org/our-projects/community-media/">http://www.mediatrust.org/our-projects/community-media/</a>
	Free online media resources	<a href="https://mediatrust.org/communications-support/resources/">https://mediatrust.org/communications-support/resources/</a>
Know How Non-Profit	Many handy short guides – Campaigning and lobbying; communications and the media; marketing and branding.	<a href="http://knowhownonprofit.org/">http://knowhownonprofit.org/</a>

## Web Tools

WikiHow.com	How to guides for setting up and using social media	<a href="http://www.wikihow.com">http://www.wikihow.com</a>
Google	Online services for non-profits	<a href="http://www.google.co.uk/nonprofits">http://www.google.co.uk/nonprofits</a>
Google Adwords	Up to £6000 of free online advertising for charities	<a href="http://www.google.co.uk/grants/">http://www.google.co.uk/grants/</a>
Google Suite/Docs	Mail, storage, communication tools at very low prices	<a href="https://gsuite.google.co.uk/">https://gsuite.google.co.uk/</a>
Mail Chimp	Free e-mail based marketing service – set up e-Bulletins/ Newsletters and mailing lists for campaigns	<a href="http://www.mailchimp.com">http://www.mailchimp.com</a>
Eventbrite	Free online event ticketing and promotion service	<a href="http://www.eventbrite.co.uk">http://www.eventbrite.co.uk</a>
Survey Monkey	Free online survey creation – great for evaluation & feedback	<a href="http://www.surveymonkey.com">http://www.surveymonkey.com</a>
Hootsuite	Combine and schedule your Tweets and Facebook updates	<a href="http://www.hootsuite.com">http://www.hootsuite.com</a>
News-groups e.g. Yahoo. Google Groups	Set up an email news group (e.g. VAI News)	<a href="http://groups.yahoo.com/neo">http://groups.yahoo.com/neo</a> <a href="https://groups.google.com/">https://groups.google.com/</a>

Canva	Create infographics, social media posts, flyers and more for web or print. Charities can upgrade to Canva for work for free,	<a href="https://www.canva.com/">https://www.canva.com/</a>
Ribbet	Free online image editor to edit, touch up and make collages.	<a href="https://www.ribbet.com/">https://www.ribbet.com/</a>
SoundCloud	Record, collect and share audio. Up to 3 hours of recordings for free	<a href="https://soundcloud.com/">https://soundcloud.com/</a>
iMovie	Free to edit video or piece together a digital story from your images and audio. Desktop and mobile.	<a href="https://www.apple.com/imovie/">https://www.apple.com/imovie/</a>
Splice	Create a fully customised video: trim, crop, titles, animations, music...	<a href="https://splice.com/">https://splice.com/</a>