



How-to Guide: Work with Media

Working with the media is a free and reliable method to promote 4-H in your community. This section will provide you with the tools and resources you need to get your 4-H story in local media – television, radio or print.

First, before contacting media, ask yourself: Is your story newsworthy? You can follow these rules as a quick guide:

YES:

- Major announcement/activity
- New facts
- Trendy issue
- Human interest
- Unusual twist
- Relation to current news
- Well-known storyline
- First, last, largest

NO:

- Meetings
- Awards
- Decision-making processes
- Ideas

If you know your story is newsworthy, you have a number of options available to contact the media: through a pitch (a phone call or letter/e-mail), a news release or a media alert.

News Pitch

A “pitch” is a quick way to inform a news reporter of a potential story. You may decide to call or email the reporter or do both. Below are quick outlines on what to say or write in your pitch.

Thirty-Second Pitch Call

- Introduce yourself
- Tell them you’re calling to suggest a story idea
- Ask if they have time to talk
- Cover who, what, where, when and why
- Ask how they would like you to follow up

Example:

Hi, my name is Joe Clover and I have a 4-H club project that is helping solve the obesity crisis facing youth today. Do you have a moment free or is there a better time I can call back?

The Healthy Lifestyles 4-H Club is hosting a fitness event on Saturday, April 1st to raise awareness about this issue and would

like to invite you to join us. It will be held at the Montgomery County 4-H office from 3:00 to 5:00 pm. Are you free? If not, I can provide you with more information.

[Make sure to provide the reporter with all of your contact information and establish a way to follow up if necessary.]

Pitch Letter/Email

- Short and to the point—one page maximum
- Describe relevance & timeliness to the reader
- Suggest a story lead
- Name contacts and resources available
- Simple sentences and active verbs
- Outline without telling entire story
- Provide full contact information

Example:

Subject: Young People Solve Youth Obesity

Hi Anna:

Did you know that more than 20% of young people today are considered to be overweight? Did you also know that 4-H, the largest youth development organization in America, is working to solve this issue?

The Healthy Lifestyles 4-H Club is hosting a fitness event on Saturday, April 1st to raise awareness about this issue and would like to invite you to join us. It will be held at the Montgomery County 4-H office from 3:00 to 5:00 pm.

If you cannot join us, but would like more information on this topic, please contact me at your convenience. My contact information is 301-444-HHHH or jclover@4husa.org.

Sincerely,

*Joe Clover
4-H member*

News Release

A news release is a more formal way to announce news and may be sent to multiple recipients.

A few quick rules to follow when creating a news release:

- Format it with double-spacing and wide margins
- Use a general font such as Times New Roman
- Add “For Immediate Release” or date and release time at the top
- Use a short headline that explains the content at a glance
- In the first paragraph:
 - Begin with dateline: CITY, State—then begin your first sentence.
 - Focus on the five W’s
- Type “-more-“ at the bottom if more than one page
- Add boilerplate* if available
- End with “# # #” or “-end-”
- Insert your contact information at the end

*A “boilerplate” is a standard statement about a company, group or program that is placed at the end of a news release. Its purpose is to give the reader basic information. Check with your county 4-H office to see if they have a standard boilerplate which you can use.

Example: 4-H is a community of more than 7 million young people across America who are learning leadership, citizenship and life skills. [Your state/county 4-H program] is part of the 4-H Youth Development Program and its parent, the Cooperative Extension System of the United States Department of Agriculture. Learn more about the 4-H adventure at www.4husa.org.

On the next page is a template news release that provides you with more information on how to make it as effective as possible.

Put news release on
letterhead when possible
or include county or state
4-H logo – with approval,
of course!

For Immediate Release

Day, date of your release

Headline – Make it Catchy and Exciting!

CITY, State—The lead sentence starts here ...

Lead paragraph: Concise, but provide all essential information – Who, what, when, where, why. Keep to two or three sentences. Only the MOST important information should go here.

Body of text: Two or three more short paragraphs that give detail about the news you are announcing. You can include more facts about the issue, a quote if possible, etc.

Last paragraph: Provide a quick summary of the news – only two or three sentences.

Insert boilerplate last: *4-H is a community of more than 7 million young people across America who are learning leadership, citizenship and life skills. The [Any Town] 4-H Program is part of the 4-H Youth Development Program and its parent, the Cooperative Extension System of the United States Department of Agriculture. Learn more about the 4-H adventure at www.4husa.org.*

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Contact: Joe Clover, 4-H member, 301-444-HHHH, jclover@4husa.org

Media Alert

A media alert is specifically designed to let media know about an event coming up. It should include information about the upcoming event and be kept to one page. Also, the media alert should:

- Be brief but compelling
- Arouse interest
- Not give away the story
- Also be send using letterhead or logo

The media alert can follow the quick outline below:

WHO: Names
WHAT: Event
WHERE: Location & directions
WHEN: Day, date & time
WHY: 2-3 sentences explaining its relevance

CONTACT: Name, telephone & email

Other Resources

The links below may also help you in your media outreach:

- <http://www.50states.com/news>
 - Links to over 3,300 newspapers in the United States
- <http://www.ap.org/>
 - Web site for The Associated Press, with contact information for local AP bureaus