



MEDIA RELATIONS TIPS for county offices

Communicating about your efforts is essential to winning support. Creating informative, concise messages and placing them with media (social and news) can help your cause. What follows is intended to help you find ways to maximize your returns on your investment in good communication.

STEP-BY-STEP

HOW TO CREATE A GOOD POST

- 1 Remember the five W's: Who, What, When, Where and Why. Toss in How, if it is relevant. Not every post has to include all six, but some may. The 5-W's + H formula works as a reminder to include essential information. If UI Extension is sponsoring a training, people need to know answers to these questions:

Who would benefit?

What is the topic?

When is it?

Where is it?

Why is it planned?

How much does it cost? **How** will it help the target audience?

Answering all six may only take two sentences:

FOR EXAMPLE

University of Idaho Extension in Latah County plans a clinic for home gardeners about organic pest control June 19 at 10 a.m. at the County Courthouse Room 2B. The free clinic caters to rising interest in organic gardening and offers details about strategies to maximize yields.

This potential post addresses all six in 46 words.

Who? Home gardeners

What? Organic pest control in home gardens

When? June 19 at 10 a.m.

Where? Latah County Courthouse

Why? More interest in organic gardening

How? Offer strategies to maximize yields

- 2 **Track down typos.** Short for typographical errors, they lurk on the sidelines of every post. They wait to jump into the game to embarrass every writer. Enlist a colleague, friend or family member,

if need be, to keep typos and grammatical errors at bay by finding problems before you post.

- 3 **No horseplay.** This is a standard newsroom rule. Have fun! But avoid goofing off in print, thinking that only you and a friend will see it. Exercise your creativity to write concise, compelling posts. Avoid being too clever.
- 4 **Confirm information before posting it!** When you ASSUME, you make an Ass of U and Me.
- 5 **Post interesting news.** This is an oxymoron. If something is not interesting, few readers would consider it news.
- 6 **If it bleeds, it leads.** Wars and car wrecks get ink for a reason: people love conflict, drama and emotion. Your posts need to include neither wars nor car wrecks, but try to create emotional ties when you can. Kids and puppies – think 4-H dog obedience classes – still sell papers and Extension programs.
- 7 **Catch lightning in a bottle.** If an Extension program for gardeners is standing room only, take a picture for Instagram, post it to Facebook and tweet all about it. That's a success, and success loves a crowd. Or if a 4-H project turns into a community event, tell your audience all about it. It's hard to define success, but we all know it when we see it.
- 8 **Don't forget Twitter.** The same basic rules apply to tweeting. You've just got far fewer words to work with — 140 to be exact.

FOR EXAMPLE

University of Idaho Extension Latah County plans gardening clinic about organic pest control: 10 a.m. June 19, County Courthouse Room 2B. — 137 characters

Get Growing! Organic pest control clinic, UI Extension Latah County Courthouse Room 2B June 19 10 a.m. Free! — 112 characters

*Get Growing! Organic pest control clinic, UI Extension Latah County Courthouse Room 2B June 19 10 a.m. Free!
<http://bit.ly/1gmCK9o> — 134 characters*

RULES FOR MEDIA SUCCESS

University of Idaho Extension doesn't have to do it all alone. Communication involves people, and people like media. That's radio, television, newspapers, blogs, bulletin boards (we're talking electronic here, like Craigslist), etc.

Once you have the message, you need a medium (singular) or media (plural).

Here's the No. 1 rule to get media attention for your program: Tell the media about it.

It's that simple. Does it always work? No. Can you get attention without following Rule No. 1? Maybe.

That's the nature of media relations. If there's a house fire down the street, don't expect a reporter to pay attention to your phone call about an organic gardening clinic

- 1 **Tell the media.** Consider email, fax, phone or snail mail as your options.
- 2 **Be responsive.** If a reporter calls, try to help. Be friendly, even if you're busy and don't have time at that moment. Follow up.
- 3 **Establish a relationship** with your newspaper, radio, television, blog or other media. Contact the communicators to find out their preferences. Call up the office. Or stop by. Help them connect a face with a name; become a source of information.
- 4 **Find out who covers the kind of story you are offering.** Some media outlets have "beats," and designated reporters who cover them.
- 5 **Provide information in a way that works for the medium.** A television station probably just wants a heads up on a visually interesting situation: Think kids digging in dirt to plant a garden. A crowded room that's a class on organic pest control, probably not so much. But let them know anyway. A slow news day can be a beautiful thing.
- 6 **Provide good information.** Accurate information is essential to a good relationship with media.
- 7 **Manage your expectations.** Not every program is going to get attention.
- 8 **Be ahead of the curve.** Offer information in a timely manner, usually one to three weeks before an event.
- 9 **Capitalize on opportunities.** For example: The Smith-Lever Act anniversary date is May 8. You might use the anniversary date to note that the University of Idaho established its first Extension office in Boise in 1910. List the ways that Extension provides practical education you can trust in your county. Use the anniversary date as a news hook.