

2017–2018

Official Back-to-School Kit

Communications
Quick Reference Guide

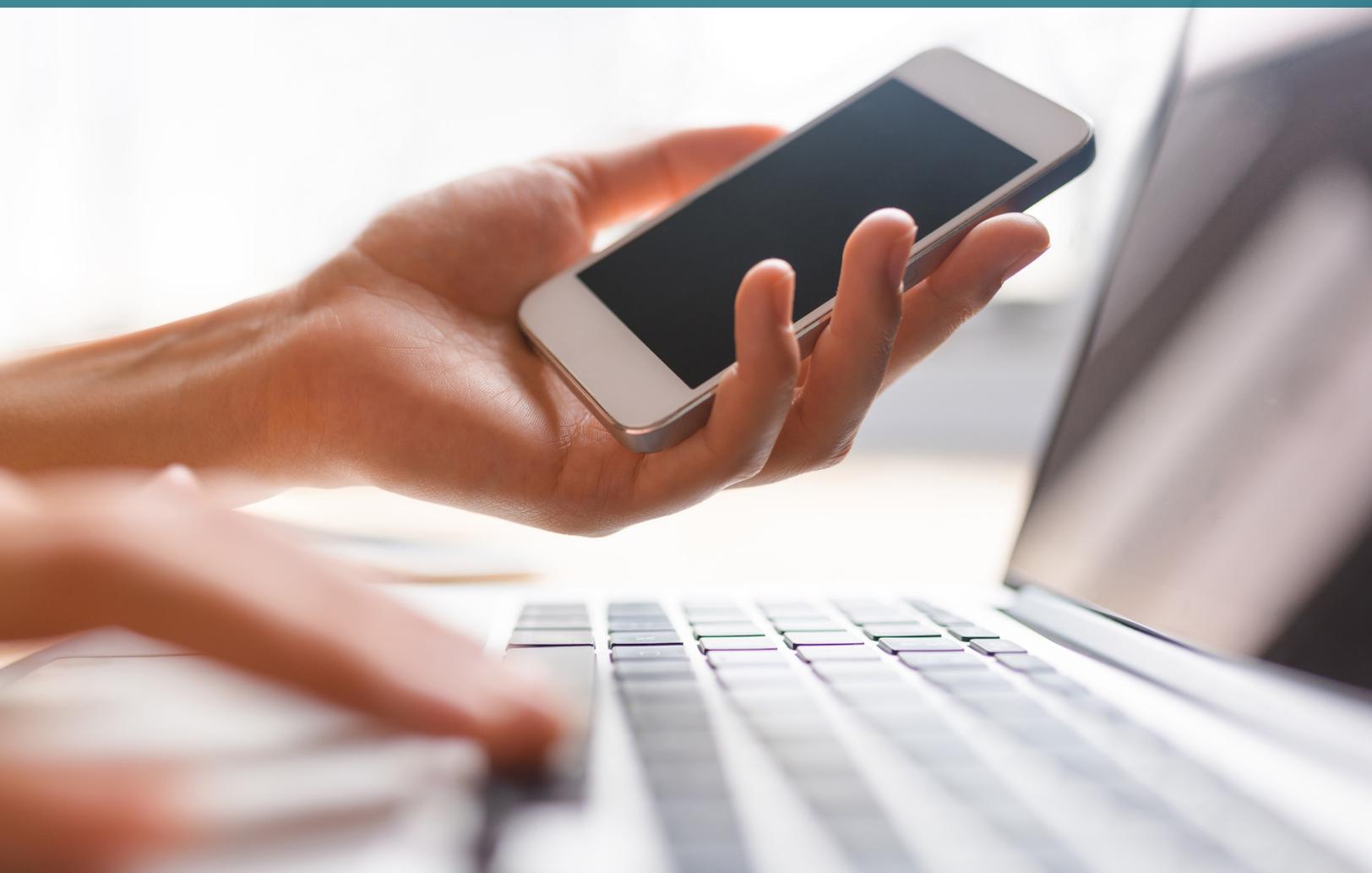


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Communicating with Members and Stakeholders

It is critical that you keep your members apprised of the work that PTA is doing and how they can play a part. This guide shares tips and best practices to effectively share messages with fellow PTA members, school staff and administrators, community members, and the media.

PTA Branding

We want to deliver a consistent, clear and uniform presence for all PTA-produced materials. When used properly, the National PTA logo and tagline help unify all PTAs and create awareness of the PTA brand. Applied consistently, these guidelines will create distinctive, credible, and sustainable messaging for all supporting PTA units, resulting in the organization working as one association with one voice.

Style Guide

STYLE AIDS COMMUNICATION.

Creating a uniform presentation extends well beyond print. It helps make your message clear to the audience. The purpose of a [stylebook](#) is to ensure this clarity.

ATTENTION TO STYLE IS EFFICIENT.

When someone drafts and proofs materials, a substantial amount of time might be spent rewriting content that does not adhere to style. Instead, this time should be spent carefully crafting the message, making it more powerful and effective.

STYLE ALSO PROTECTS THE INTEGRITY OF OUR BRAND.

Poor grammar, misspellings, and inconsistencies reflect poorly on an association. An association that advocates for children, particularly their education, should be a strong proponent of consistent style.

Review National PTA's Style Guide

LOGO USAGE

The National PTA logo is the core element of the PTA visual identity. It should be seen on all external-facing media and on internal business communication pieces. In order to maintain a greater level of consistency, the logo should only be reproduced from approved electronic files and should never be altered or distorted in any way. Preformatted custom logos are available for download at [PTA.org](#).

Learn more about National PTA brand and visual standards.

USE OF THE PTA NAME

Groups cannot use the PTA name without our prior written approval. While PTA has become a part of American vocabulary, in the same way that people might call any soft drink “Coke” or any facial tissue “Kleenex,” the name is protected with a number of federal trademarks and has been for more than 100 years.

Companies cannot use the PTA name in any manner that claims or could reasonably be inferred to suggest a relationship that does not exist. Companies may, however, reference PTA in statements of fact, for example, company X can state that it offers services to PTAs.

If you see the PTA name used in an inappropriate way or have related questions, please contact National PTA's Director of Strategic Communications.

Newsletters

For most PTAs, newsletters are the most comprehensive communication vehicle that the group shares with its many audiences. A newsletter, whether print or electronic, contains several short articles and graphics that bulletin important information for a specific group of recipients. While most PTA units produce a newsletter publication, PTAs that cannot or do not wish to produce their own may be able to contribute to their school's newsletter.

Because a newsletter is the main means of communication for many PTAs, it is a good idea to define your audience as broadly as is practical. Generally speaking, you will want to include the following groups: PTA members, school teachers and staff, all parents and caregivers (including nonmembers), school superintendent, and school board members.

Print Newsletters vs. Electronic Newsletters

In an increasingly digital world, you may find that many of your members are accustomed to online communication, while other members may prefer a physical print newsletter. Surveying your members to get a sense of your unit's preference will help ensure that your members actually read your publication.

Regardless of the format (or combination of formats) you choose to produce, here are a few things to think about:

- **Cost:** When publishing a print newsletter, there will be additional costs to produce and distribute the publication. Paper, printing, and postage costs may also increase depending on the size of each newsletter and the size of the audience who will receive it. When selecting to produce an e-newsletter, printing and mailing costs do not apply (though many e-newsletter companies charge by the email address). However, there are many e-newsletter companies who do not charge for their services and others who charge a nominal amount (e.g. Benchmark emailing service). You can always design a print newsletter, take a picture and then email it to your recipients.
- **Time and Skill Levels:** Print newsletters can be easily designed in word processing programs that are user-friendly and already used by many members in their day-to-day lives. While most free e-newsletter publication sites are intended for tech-novices, the editor should consider technical skill limitations that may compromise the quality of the publication or consume an excessive amount of time.
- **Tracking:** Once you send the print newsletter, you have no information on who has received it, who opened it or how long the person read it. E-newsletter services have tools in place to see this information, including the open rate (how many people open the email), click rate (how many people click links in the email), and bounce rate (how many emails did not reach the intended inbox).

Article Assignment

Once you have determined the format of your newsletter, a good next step is to develop a general outline for the school year. After you have established an outline, you can pencil in people to write articles. It is normally a good idea to have a person write the article who is directly involved with or interested in a particular topic or event. When assigning articles, you should ensure that the person has the time and is willing to do it, and you should provide them with:

- the length of the article needed, usually given in number of words;
- the deadline for submitting the final article; and
- the general focus the article should take.

You should follow up with the author before the deadline to ensure the article is on track for completion. If the right person does not have the time or writing skills to do the article, try to set up an interview to get the important details to write the article.

Selecting an Editor and Establishing an Editorial Calendar

If your PTA has a newsletter, your committee will need to appoint an editor who will be responsible for deciding on and acquiring the content for each issue. Ideally, the editor will have some experience producing publications, a flair for language, and an understanding of the needs of the audience. The editor should be responsible for keeping up-to-date on education and school-specific issues and finding out from readers what interests them.

Although the content of a newsletter varies with the interests and purposes of individual PTAs, there are some core principles to keep in mind when planning what to include. The main interests of the audience are: the school the PTA represents, the children who attend the school, issues that may affect the school community, and the PTA's activities and accomplishments. You can also subscribe to National PTA's e-newsletters for content ideas by [clicking here](#).

One aid in creating a newsletter is establishing an editorial calendar. This calendar provides a general outline of the topics each newsletter will contain, as well as regular features that will appear in every newsletter. Editorial calendars take into account seasonal events, for example, an annual book sale, conference, or PTA program (e.g., Take Your Family to School Week always occurs in February).

A partial editorial calendar might look something like this:

In every issue:

- PTA president's message
- School calendar
- PTA calendar
- School contact information
- PTA contact information
- PTA membership form

September issue – Back to School:

- Requirements for entry to school
- PTA volunteer sign-up opportunities and mail-in form
- Back-to-school PTA and school events

October issue – Fall Fun:

- Pictures from the first week of school
- Halloween pageant
- Annual PTA family nature walk

November issue – Holiday Happenings:

- Pictures from family nature walk and/or Halloween pageant
- Thanksgiving food drive information
- School holiday pageant auditions announcement

In addition to establishing an editorial calendar, it is important to create a schedule for your newsletter and stick to it. When deciding when and how often to produce a newsletter, it helps to ask your audience for their preferences – monthly, bimonthly, quarterly, etc. You will also need to consider the amount of time available to create and post your newsletter when deciding its frequency.

Website

Every PTA has the same challenge: How can I make my website an effective portal for my members? PTAs need a strong website presence for members and other visitors to enhance our brand as the premier source for relevant information for children, their families and schools.

Design

Your PTA website should generally look and feel like the audience you desire to attract. If you do not have the budget to pay a web design firm to create your site, you can use one of the three top free site-building applications:

- [Drupal](#): More advanced level, web developer friendly
- [Joomla](#): Intermediate level, not as user-friendly
- [WordPress](#): Easy to use, good for blogging

We also recommend that you use our [National PTA Visual Identity Standards](#) to help extend our brand to your PTA website. This demonstrates a continuity of information and message. Incorporate your PTA colors and branding as well. Also consider your strategy. As a general practice, use images and settings that show diversity and inclusion.

Navigation

Even if you do not have a professional website, an organized website will give your visitors a positive user experience. Your members want easy access to the information they need. If visitors cannot find that important information, they will leave your site without accessing your resources or knowing what events and benefits your PTA offers. Organize your website so there are clear sections and consistency throughout the site. The best ways to accomplish this are to:

- Establish a solid site map – or content outline – of your website. Start by creating approximately six key topic areas, which will be the main sections of your website. Whenever you need to add new content or new sections to your website, you will be able to take the existing hierarchy into consideration by glancing at your site map.
- We recommend the following six main sections for your website:
 - o News & Events. Include your events, news releases and media coverage, as well as National PTA news and events.
 - o Advocacy. Share information on your PTA's advocacy efforts and include National PTA resources.
 - o Programs. List various local and National PTA programs and resources.
 - o Members. Information for members only, including resources and tools to manage and grow a PTA.
 - o Parents. Provide tips and resources for families to use for their child and encourage participation in their local PTA.
 - o Schools. Offer partnership opportunities and resources for teachers and schools in educating children and encouraging family engagement.

- Create a global navigation bar, so wherever your members/visitors go on your site, they can easily navigate content.
- Make sure your search engine works and is easy to find. All content should be searchable from a common area, such as at the top right of each webpage.

Content

Make sure your links are up-to-date and that you remove past events and dated information quickly. This diligence will give you credibility. Plus, your members will be interested in what you have to offer and will most likely share it with others. Here are some tips on how to keep your web content current:

- Check the [National PTA website](#), where you can access these helpful resources:
 - [Conferences & Events](#)
 - [Local Leader Resources](#)
 - [Popular Content on PTA.org](#)
 - [Press Center](#)
 - [State Leader Resources](#)
- Keep track of all of your events and when they end.
- Make sure your materials are as small and compressed as possible to allow users to download your content as quickly as possible.
- Integrate your site with social media.

Social Media

Social media is a powerful tool for individuals to join together, share content and ideas, and engage in open conversation. In order for social media to be successful, PTAs must be committed to supporting honest, transparent and knowledgeable dialogue. Social media can be used for a variety of reasons over a multitude of channels. For PTAs, social media is well-suited to:

- Share information that is relevant to your members' needs and interests.
- Raise awareness of education and child-related issues and support advocacy efforts and partner initiatives.
- Generate interest and participation in your PTA events, programs and initiatives.

If your PTA is not already on a social media channel but wants to be, the first step is simple: sign up! Be sure that you give plenty of thought to the username and/or URL of your page or account, because once you open the account, you will not be able to change it without losing your fans or followers. You also want to be strategic about creating an account on certain platforms. You do not have to be on every social media channel. For instance, creating a Facebook account is probably more effective to begin with than a Pinterest or Instagram account.

Once you are on a social media channel, do not feel compelled to immediately start posting content. Do research and understand what content best fits your audience. If you are unsure of how things work or what sort of content is appropriate for you to post, monitor comparable social media channels, publish content at different times of the day to understand when you get the most engagement and create quarterly benchmarks, like tracking your “likes” or follower count to see audience growth.

If you are confused by a technical function on a social media site, you can always refer to each site's “Help” section to help you familiarize yourself with the tools, capabilities and standard practices. The help section is often located in the website footer.

Platforms

Facebook

Associations use “pages” on Facebook, rather than personal profiles. You can create a page from your personal Facebook account, grant other PTA leaders editorial access to the page, and post on behalf of your PTA. On a page, you can post content on a central wall, including photos, questions and surveys, news bulletins, tips, and videos, all while interacting directly with commenters. Facebook users have the option to “like” your page, which means that the content you post on your page wall can show up in their news feeds. If you do not already have a page for your unit, here is how you can get started.

[Access Facebook’s Getting Started Checklist](#)

Post Frequency:

The frequency of your posts is a delicate balancing act. Post too little and your posts are unlikely to end up in your fans’ news feeds, but post too much and your fans are likely to “unlike” you. Once your page is up, try to post once or twice a day if possible. It is often beneficial to create a content line-up and slot them in advance using the “Schedule Post” function.

National PTA on Facebook:

Check out and “like” [National PTA’s Facebook Page](#) to receive content ideas that you can share and repost for your unit.

Twitter

Twitter allows users to share short messages up to 140 characters in length. Due to the brevity of its messages, Twitter is an ideal channel to share straightforward information, including news coverage, advocacy efforts, event promotion, statistics and member recognition. Users can post video footage, images and links to refer Twitter followers to external sites. Twitter is also the preferred channel for sharing live information, for example, participants can tweet throughout a PTA function to give followers updates and quick tidbits of information about the event.

[Follow National PTA on Twitter](#)

Twitter Terminology:

- Tweet – a 140-character message sent via Twitter
- Follower – any Twitter user that subscribes to another user’s tweets
- Handle – the username
- Hashtag – characterized by a “#” symbol, the hashtag is a way to assign a topic/keyword/phrase to your tweet (i.e., #HealthAndSafety, #TodaysPTA)
- Mentions – characterized by the inclusion of “@handle,” a mention is a way to refer to another user and have your tweet show up in their timeline (i.e., @NationalPTA just released its new report)
- RT – standing for “retweet,” RT at the start of a tweet indicates that the user is sending another user’s content.

Other Social Media Channels

While Facebook and Twitter are considered the two dominant social media channels, many other channels exist that serve various functions:

- Blogs – short for web log, a blog is a website where the author(s) shares experiences, observations, images and other multimedia in an open forum. A wide variety of companies offer free blogs including WordPress and Blogger
 - [National PTA Blog – One Voice](#)
- YouTube – video-sharing website. Currently, the third most visited website in the world
 - [National PTA on YouTube](#)
- Flickr – photo-sharing website that allows users to upload images, share and download others’ pictures
 - [National PTA on Flickr](#)
- Pinterest – a virtual pin board where users find images and links across the Internet, categorize the subject material, and “pin” to a collection of bulletin boards
 - [National PTA on Pinterest](#)
- Instagram – photo and video-sharing website that enables users to take pictures and videos and share them on other social media platforms
 - [National PTA on Instagram](#)
- LinkedIn – a professional networking site that allows users to create professional profiles and connect with other users and companies to create a professional network of contacts

Dealing with Negative Comments:

Negative comments are an inevitable part of social media. To be successful on social media, you have to be willing to take the good with the bad and recognize that you cannot control what other users say – you can only control how you react and what you post. In many cases, a post that you find disagreeable or contrary to your own opinion may not provide grounds for deletion. If you delete every post that you find objectionable, you may escalate the problem or alienate users on your page. Grounds for deleting a post include: use of profanity or derogatory language, personal insults or disrespectful language against another user, or spam or overly solicitous content.

For most other comments, especially those that are of a “customer-service” nature, the best solution is to guide the conversation away from your page by having the user contact you directly via Facebook message or email. For other negative comments, it is best to respond in a respectful way and provide accurate information to support your position. Remain calm and judicious, and refrain from sharp, heated posts.

Please note that you cannot delete negative comments on Twitter, but you can report or block serious offenders.

Our Children Newsroom and Magazine

Our Children Magazine (PTAOurChildren.org) is the unique voice for parents. This online publication was created for the parent who's always on the go and looking for the best parenting, wellness, education, and PTA community info to help their child excel at school and in life.

This online publication:

- Offers tips to help parents best support their child's academic success and well-being
- Tells relevant and timely stories about the successes and challenges of students, schools and families
- Spotlights, motivates, and inspires everyday heroes who work to make every child's potential a reality

The [Our Children Newsroom](#) provides up-to-the-minute education and PTA-related news. The goal of the newsroom is to produce and aggregate editorial content that gives PTA members a greater understanding of curriculum, advocacy, family engagement and effective teaching issues. Every year, National PTA produces a special print edition of the Our Children Magazine. This issue, as it appears in print, is available as a digital edition in the Our Children Newsroom. The digital edition of [Our Children](#) is available to all members and has easy-to-navigate page turners, a table of contents, and social media sharing capabilities, among other features.

Promote Your Program and Event

Marketing and media relations are important ways to raise awareness of programs and events and build support for PTA among families, educators and administrators, elected officials, business, and community leaders and the general public.

Use the following suggestions to kick-start your plan to promote your PTA programs and events.

To Students and Families

Use a variety of channels to reach students and families. Consider creating promotional messages and materials in multiple languages to reach all families in your school community. Some possibilities include the following:

- Nothing beats a personal invitation! Ask volunteers to make individual phone calls to parents of all students or targeted groups.
- Use the school's automated phone system to call parents, if available. If your school does not have a system in place, consider establishing a "phone tree" among PTA members.
- Host a school-wide assembly to introduce the program. Feature photos from last year's program, if possible.
- Include messages in students' morning announcements.
- Hang posters and fliers in visible locations, and send fliers home to parents.
- Post deadlines and reminders on outdoor signs near student drop-off and pickup locations.
- Post announcements and updates on the school and/or PTA website and via social media (e.g., Facebook and Twitter).
- Write an article about the program for a PTA or school newsletter. Showcase the impact of prior years' events and/or the benefits of family engagement. Ask a student to write a similar article for the school newspaper.
- Engage "student ambassadors" to talk positively about the program among peers.

Among Teachers and Administrators

The more involved faculty and staff are in planning the program, the more likely they will serve as "champions" of the program among other school leaders. Consider the following ideas to engage school staff:

- Request time at an in-service training, staff meeting or school board meeting to present the program to teachers. Highlight the benefits of family engagement and invite their ideas about how they might encourage their classes to participate.
- Provide suggestions for how the program or event might be linked to curriculum. Ask a teacher volunteer to create a sample lesson plan and share it with peers.

In the Community

When reaching out to potential community partners, focus on the impact of your program or event on students, schools and families. Here are some ways you can share information with your community:

- Work with school officials to develop media releases to secure local coverage. Do not forget smaller, local media outlets such as neighborhood association blogs and newsletters.
- Community bulletin boards can be good places to post program fliers. This can help you reach parents who are not often at the school building.
- For more information on engaging community partners, visit the Fundraising Quick Reference Guide.

Working with the Media

The media play a crucial role in our society by helping shape public opinion. Getting media coverage can be a huge asset to raising awareness and educating members of your community about any news, stories or programs you might be working on.

Media relations includes developing materials to use to share information, reaching out to reporters and outlets to encourage coverage of programs, initiatives and events, responding to inquiries, conducting or coordinating interviews, and building relationships with members of the media. The most important aspects of media relations include knowing what is newsworthy and building relationships within the media. It is critical that PTAs work proactively with the media, and at times, it also is necessary for PTAs to work reactively with the media.

A few things you will want to keep in mind when working with members of the media:

- Always read or watch the news outlets in your market before reaching out to them. It is important to know what type of stories they tend to cover, and it is critical to reach out to the right reporters.
- Reporters are busy, and media resources are dwindling these days. Reporters rely more and more on public relations professionals to give them a complete story with up-to-date facts and statistics that they will not need to double check.
- Email is your best approach unless you have a great working relationship with a particular reporter and feel comfortable picking up the phone to call directly.
- Only pitch stories to them that you know they would have interest in covering. And if they do not cover your story, thank them anyway. Or perhaps point them to another resource where they can get the information they are looking for. They will remember that you helped them and that will make the difference for next time.
- Building and maintaining good relationships with reporters will be what helps you place your story. As you carry out programs and events, you can develop positive working relationships with print and broadcast professionals and organizations in your community.

Media Relations Tools

Tools you will use to conduct media outreach are a pitch, press release, media advisory, op-ed, letter to the editor and media statement. All are designed to communicate your message, program or event to media outlets.

MEDIA PITCH

A media pitch is a great tool to convince a journalist your story is newsworthy and relevant to his or her audience. It can either supplement a press release or serve as a stand-alone tool. A pitch is less formal and more targeted to a specific reporter than a standard press release. Think of it as a short letter to a reporter outlining why your story is of interest to his/her particular beat and audience. Perhaps he/she has covered this issue in the past or could benefit from connecting with you (or another spokesperson) to gain insight, information, or news. A pitch is your chance to present yourself as a valuable resource. It should provide a reporter a quick snapshot of who you are, what your news is, and why it is relevant.

PRESS RELEASE

A press release is a written, formal statement that announces a range of news items, including awards, new partnerships or programs. A press release is useful when there is a milestone event, program launch, or other “big news” coming from your PTA that is intended for a broad media audience. It follows a standard format, contains the appropriate contact information, and allows media outlets the chance to follow up with you should they be interested in pursuing a story.

Sample Press Release & Sample Media Advisory

Media Advisory

A media advisory or media alert is an abbreviated form of a press release that is used to provide information to the media to persuade them to cover an event, meeting or performance. A media advisory conveys basic facts in the format of what/why, who, when and where.

Opinion-Editorial (Op-Ed)

An op-ed piece is written to grab attention and generate support among various groups, including elected officials, business and community leaders, and the general public. This type of piece is designed to express a single, clear point of view that is supported by facts and statistics. An op-ed submission should focus on a subject that is timely and newsworthy and include a clear call to action.

Letter to the Editor (LTE)

A letter to the editor is another way to reach a large audience. A letter can take a position for or against an issue, simply inform, or both. Letters to the editor are short and concise and can include emotions and/or facts. Letters are designed to reference or highlight relevant, hot topics, recent events in a community, or a recent news article.

Media Statement

A media statement is written in response to a breaking news story or event. A statement is used when media outlets are already covering a story to provide quotes that could be incorporated or when an association wishes to comment on a story. A statement is short and concise and is used to grab the attention of reporters or media outlets.

Conducting Interviews

Scoring a phone or a face-to-face interview is a great opportunity to relay a story or news to a reporter who will then “package” the story for his/her audience. Here are some helpful interview techniques and tips to be an effective spokesperson for your PTA:

- Prepare talking notes on focus points you want to make. Keep this fairly succinct as there is always a possibility that the reporter will edit down your response. Think of these as “sound bites.” Try to practice these at home before your interview.
- Listen to the interviewer’s questions and answer thoughtfully. If possible, try to bridge this to your talking points.
- If you do not know the answer to a question, that is fine. Tell the reporter and let him/her know that you will follow up with it.
- Be authentic, passionate and truthful. Be yourself! It will help you to relax and will come across as more sincere.

Photography and Videography

Photos and videos convey the excitement of a school carnival or the size of a crowd at a town hall meeting like nothing else. They add great visual interest to any form of communication your PTA might create, and they can be great to share with your local media. With the advent of smartphones, users can quickly and easily capture images and video footage. But to get the best quality pictures and video possible, it is a good idea to find a volunteer with experience and a good camera. Always remember to give credit where credit is due. With each image, be sure to include the name of both the photographer and the PTA.

Release Forms

In the digital age where a picture can spread across the Internet in a matter of minutes, many families are sensitive about their privacy, particularly when it comes to their children. To protect your PTA from possible legal difficulty and to respect these sensitivities, it is recommended that you obtain a release form for pictures with children and for any photos you intend to use in advertising or on merchandise for sale.

To aid in the process of securing release forms, consider creating an annual form that families can sign or recording a verbal consent on film. You should retain release forms for the life of the photo. It should be noted that school release forms are not a replacement for PTA forms. National PTA will not publish any photographs without a signed release form.

Please visit PTA.org and PTAKit.org for additional Media resources.



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