



Publicising and gaining media coverage for your project

About Mark

Mark is Creative Director at London public relations agency MHP. He has developed media campaigns for some of the biggest brands in the world, including Aviva, but has also supported local charities and organisations through pro-bono PR work. In 2014, one of his campaigns won seven major PR industry awards including PR Campaign of the Year.

How can PR help you and your project?

All over the UK charities, organisations and clubs are doing incredible and inspiring work to help others and make the local community a better place to live in.

Every charity and community project has a great story to tell, but most of the time people don't hear about the good work they do.

Wherever you are in the UK you will have a local newspaper, website or radio station that covers local news and will be looking for stories about what is happening in the community. You have a great story to tell, so that's where we come in to help your cause be seen and heard.

Contacting a newspaper or radio station about your charity or community project may seem daunting, so to help you raise awareness of your Aviva Community Fund entry, here are some tips on how to best share your story with your local media.

Have a story

When you approach a local newspaper or radio station you need to have what we in the trade call "a news hook". This is something that you can imagine making a headline in your local paper. It could be that you are staging an event, have started a new fundraising drive or, on a more serious note, are facing closure due to lack of funds.

The fact that you have submitted an entry to the Aviva Community Fund is a news hook in itself, but the bigger story is that you now need votes from as many people as possible to increase your chances of winning this funding.

Click the link here for my beginner's guide on *How to Write a Press Release and Get It to Local Media*

SEPARATE ATTACHMENT

Writing a press release

A press release is a short document that contains all the information a journalist may need in order to write an article, or speak about a news story on the radio. It may seem really daunting staring at a blank screen and wondering where to begin writing a press release, but in truth, nobody knows better than you what a difference your project or charity makes on people's lives, so this is your chance to tell it. Here are a few tips to help you get started:

Start with a headline

Like every news story you read in the paper, every press release starts with a headline. This is your chance to capture the attention of the journalist or radio producer who will be reading your press release. While you can be creative, keep the headline short, sweet and to the point. Ultimately it has to capture the spirit of what you do and the story you want to tell.



Remember the “Five Ws”

The key to writing a press release is to make sure you speak about the “Five Ws”, which form the basis of telling a good news story. In this case, for your story about the Aviva Community Fund, the “Five Ws” are below:

- **Who** you are
- **What** your group does
- **When** Aviva Community Fund voting closes
- **Where** people can go to vote for your Aviva Community Fund entry
- **Why** you need funding and how the funding will be spent

Less is more

Sometimes people think they have to write a novel to get their story across. The first thing to remember is journalists don’t give marks out of ten for prose or plot in a press release, they are very busy and want to know all the essential information about your community or charity group in a couple of brief paragraphs.

Condense your story in the opening paragraph

If you pick up a newspaper or read news articles online you’ll notice that the story is summed up in the opening paragraph or two. So, when it comes to starting your press release, get into the mindset of a newspaper article; write in the same way and get straight to the point. Make sure you include the name of your group, what it is you do, and why you have applied to the Aviva Community Fund right at the beginning of the release. It might take a couple of attempts but it’s worth getting right.

Building the story

Once you’ve written the first couple of paragraphs of your press release and included the “Five Ws”, think about what the most important things about your project or organisation are that you want people to know. If you aren’t sure, ask yourself some questions:

- Why were we set up?
- Whose lives have we improved or changed?
- Why do we need funds?
- What would we do with funds?
- What would happen if we weren’t active?

The answer to these questions should form the rest of your press release. Again, remember to keep the language and information simple. If you aren’t comfortable with writing in the style of a newspaper article, make it even easier for yourself and simply use a question & answer format.

e.g. What would we do with the funds?

If we are granted funding from the Aviva Community Fund, we will use it to pay for two of our volunteers to go on first aid courses to make sure everybody knows how to deal with an injury on the football pitch as quickly as possible.

End with a quote



To add some personality to your press release you might want to finish with a short quote from yourself or someone who plays an active role in the organisation. It doesn't need to be a speech, it could just be an answer to one of the questions above.

e.g. Joe Bloggs, coordinator of Young Starts, says "We really appreciate the chance to apply to the ACF for additional funding which could make all the difference to the children we help. We now really need people to log on to the ACF voting page and vote for Young Starts to increase our chances of winning funding. With even a small amount of extra funding we can update some of the tired toys we have to offer the children a better day out."

Include contact details and the URL to the ACF voting page

Once a journalist has read your press release, it's likely that they will have a few questions for you. Be sure to end the press release with your phone number, email address and, where appropriate, the URL to the website or social media accounts for your charity or community group. Also remember to include the URL link to your entry on the Aviva Community Fund voting page so those who read the story can log on and vote for you to win.

END OF ATTACHMENT

Getting your press release seen

Approaching the media

- Visit the website of your local newspaper or radio station where its contact details will be listed
- Call up and ask for the news editor and say that you have got a story for them. When you get through, introduce yourself and explain why you are calling and what your story is about: again it's the same information that should be in your opening paragraph
- Offer to send over your press release and ask for an email address. If a journalist is interested, take the opportunity to tell them a bit more about what your group does in the community and why it needs funds
- Don't be too put off if they sound rushed. News editors get lots of calls and have deadlines to meet
- It's best to call news editors and radio producers between 9am and midday
- When sending the press release it's best to cut and paste your text into the body of an email rather than sending it as an attachment (some organisations won't open attachments in case they have viruses)
- If you are too busy to call then see if there is an email address on the website, but it's always good to call up later that day to check that the news editor received your press release and see if they want more information

Building relationships

The most important thing to remember is that the media is your friend, so don't be afraid of speaking to them. If a reporter is interested in the work you do, invite them to come down and experience the charity or community project for themselves.

The next time you have another story about the work you do, go back to the same journalist you spoke to about the ACF. They will remember you and it saves having to explain who you are and what you do all over again!

Other tips

The power of celebrity

Has a celebrity supported your charity or group in the past? Maybe there is a local celebrity who you can contact to see if they would like to get involved and help you drum up votes for your Aviva Community Fund entry? In some cases, a local sports team may ask a player or two to show their support for a local cause such as your own.

Or why not aim big and contact to your favourite celebrities to see if they will support your project or organisation – they don't have to visit but maybe just send a tweet, post a selfie or send something you can sell for auction. If you don't ask, you'll never know!

Stunts

Remember how suddenly everyone was doing the ice bucket challenge for charity? Can you think of things you can do among the friends and families involved in your group that could make local news? And whatever it is you dream up, make sure your local paper knows about it.

Word of mouth – engage with all community networks

Just as the best gossip takes place at the school gates or at coffee mornings, make sure that everyone in the community knows about the work you do and how they can support your application for the Aviva Community Fund. Contact as many local groups and organisations as possible such as schools, the Women's Institute, local sports clubs and the NCT and tell them about your Aviva Community Fund entry and ask the members of these groups to vote for you. Tell everyone you know because they may need your help one day too!