



Wisconsin Park & Recreation Association

Media Release: Tips and Tools

The enclosed sample is a “swiss cheese” media (or press) release, (I know, very appropriate for the Cheese Head Capital of the World). The holes are to be filled by your agency’s stories and examples.

Filling in the “Swiss Cheese” Media Release

Ideally, a media release should read like a news story, including an attention-grabbing headline, facts and quotes. Many wire services and radio news departments rely heavily on the text media releases for their stories, taking the text verbatim in many instances. Thus, descriptions should be as clear as possible, as reporters are unlikely to call for clarification.

While most media releases report on upcoming events, some can describe more general information, in this case, the importance of Parks and Recreation agencies providing after school youth services. The information should always be pertinent and relevant to recent events, however, and the message should always be clear. This sample media release pitches Parks and Recreation as vital components of a community needing to provide viable alternative activities to their youth.

For your benefit, the correct format has been used on the attached media release. Keep in mind as you fill in the following release that it should be no longer than two pages, although there are rare exceptions.

Hints for Pitching Your Story

While you cannot have full control of factors that determine whether or not your article gets placed, there are a few ways in which you can increase the chances for placement.

- *Follow Up* - Once you've faxed or emailed the release to the appropriate editor or reporter, be sure to follow up with a phone call. This is needed partly because a media release often doesn't reach the right person the first time. **Be prepared to send or fax out additional copies of your media release to the same media outlets twice, or even three times.** Another reason for follow up is to make sure that the reporter or editor actually sees or reads your media release. They are bombarded with story ideas each day. Thus, this is your way of making sure that your piece gets their attention.
- *Pitch Stories* – As a Parks and Recreation professional entrenched in the issues relating to your work, it is easy to forget not everyone is as involved and knowledgeable of the subject as you are. Don't delve into topics that might be abstract or inaccessible to someone working outside of the field. Additionally, editors prefer stories about people, not issues. Always incorporate a compelling story about families and individuals e.g., someone whose life was dramatically effected by the services provided by Parks and Recreation.
- *Talk to the Media* – Some reporters will call back for more information. Return their phone calls promptly and be available for their questions and visits. Invite a reporter to visit your site.

Sample Media Release
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
(date)

CONTACT: (your name)
(your phone number)

After School Hours Remain Critical to Well Being of Youth

(City/Town), WI – A recent study reminds us that availability of productive activities and adult supervision during the after school hours of 3 p.m. – 6 p.m. remain critical to the health and safety of youth in our community. The Rand Health study, released in December, surveyed over 2000 high school youth to examine when and where youths have sex and whether there is a relationship between unsupervised time and sex, sexually transmitted diseases, and substance abuse.

The survey found that “ a substantial number of youths currently spend long periods of time without adult supervision and have limited opportunities to participate in after school activities. More than half of sexually active youths reported that they had sex at home after school, and, particularly for boys, sexual and drug related risks increased as the amount of unsupervised time increased.” Researchers concluded that “given the independent association between the amount of unsupervised time and sexual behaviors (with STD rates suggestive of particularly risky sexual behaviors) and substance use behaviors, it is worth considering increasing youth supervision, if not by parents, then by programs organized at schools or in other community settings.”

We have known for a while that the hours between 3 p.m. – 6 p.m. are critical to youth in that violence involving them, either as victims or perpetrators, peak during that time of day. We also know that the task of supervising youth is increasingly burdensome to many working parents, who are often unavailable until dinnertime. The Rand Health study further proves the need for after school programs, for options and alternatives for our youth.

In the current budget crisis, programs serving youth during non-school hours are in grave danger of being eliminated. Funding generally goes only to programs offered at school sites. We are well aware that there are numerous programs outside of schools serving youth and keeping youth safe and healthy throughout Wisconsin. Such programs often work in conjunction with school site programs to provide more choices for youth.

As (*job title of this op-ed's author*) of (*name of local agency*), which offers multiple successful and effective programs for youth, I urge the policy and decision makers in our community to keep funding for youth programs alive. Help us provide youth the space to be learn & play, space to be safe & secure, space to create & imagine.

Submitted by: (*Name of park and recreation director or staff*)

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(*Name of your agency*) serves over (*number*) youth in its (*number*) programs, each year. Programs include (name of specific programs). Park and recreation staff members are well trained in (*e.g., conflict management, youth development, leadership development*) and serve as ideal mentors and supervisors for youth in the community. For more information on programs, please contact (*your agency's contact information*).