

# **I**ndependent Courts Toolbox™ created by The Constitution Project's COURTS INITIATIVE



*Working with the Media*

## **The News Release**

The news release is the conventional means of conveying news to the media. It follows a particular form that organizes basic information and presents it in a concise, professional manner.

There are certain guidelines to remember in creating releases:

### **Be concise.**

Reporters are busy people. They do not have time to wade through a lot of unnecessary information to determine if they are interested in a story. If they have to work too hard to figure out what the story is, your release will more than likely be "deep sixed." Therefore, a release should never be more than two full pages (fewer, if possible). Give them the basics in a release and then provide supplemental information on separate sheets that reporters can use if they want to. Additional or supplemental information can be provided in the form of background sheets, fact sheets, Q&As, graphs and charts, etc.

### **Be creative and interesting.**

Reporters and editors get scores, perhaps hundreds, of releases each day. Give them a reason to read and run yours.

### **Include visuals.**

The chances of getting a story in the print media go up dramatically if you include visuals such as photography, charts, and graphs.

### **Include directional information.**

This includes information such as the name and phone number of the primary contact, the date, and whether the information is for immediate release or embargoed until a later date. The phrase "---more---" appears at the bottom of the page when there are additional pages to the release. (Pages do get misplaced.) The phrase "---30---" appears at the end of a release to designate that it is, in fact, the end. (Don't ask. We have no idea how it originated.)

**Consider embargoing material.**

In order to give reporters more time to plan and prepare articles prior to an event, a release may be embargoed. This means that you can send out a release to reporters with the understanding that it will not appear in a news article until after a specific future date. For example, a release dated January 1, 2000, can go out with the notation "Embargoed Until January 7, 2000." Reputable reporters generally respect embargoes as a matter of honor but, other than that, there is no means of enforcement.

**Make your headline a hook.**

A boring headline is a missed opportunity. Often reporters will not get beyond the headline. Pique their interest with it to get them to read further.

**The first paragraph is your executive summary.**

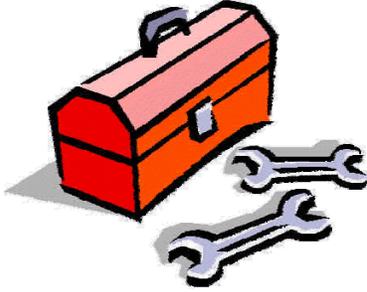
It should immediately convey the most basic information about the event. Obviously, however, it should be presented in a way that keeps reporters or editors reading. For effective promotion, the name of your organization must be in the first paragraph; in the first sentence is best.

**Include quotes.**

Include quotes that can be included in news articles. Your quotes should be at least as exciting as your news. If the principals responsible for the release don't sound excited about it, how will you interest a reporter? Therefore, these should not be bland boilerplate quotes. They should be creative and articulate, written "sound bites."

**Include a positioning statement.**

Releases should close with a brief statement about the purpose and identity of the issuing group. This gives credibility to the document as the effort of a legitimate organization. It also provides the opportunity to say a little bit about the sponsoring organization that would not be appropriate earlier in the release.



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## Sample News Release

The following pages illustrate a sample news release.

# **Bipartisan Group to Settle Verbal Wrestling Between President and Congress Over Federal Judgeships**

## **New Research To Determine Responsibility for Lengthy Vacancies on Bench**

For Immediate Release

September 15, 1999

**Contact:** Tim Kolly  
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Washington—Citizens for Independent Courts (CFIC), a high-level panel of the Constitution Project, will soon publish new research that will settle the battle between the Clinton administration and the Senate over who is to blame for the current crisis in filling federal court vacancies. The data, the most definitive to date, will be presented in September by co-chairs Lloyd Cutler, former Democratic presidential counselor, and Mickey Edwards, former Republican congressman from Oklahoma.

The president has blamed Senate leaders for dragging their feet on confirmation hearings; the Senate blames the president for not nominating individuals in a timely manner. "This is a consumer issue," said Executive Director Virginia Sloan. "The president and the Senate can point fingers at each other but, at the end of the day, it's ordinary Americans, like seniors seeking Social Security benefits, who suffer hardship having to wait years for their cases to be heard."

Until now, comprehensive information was unavailable because 1) partial records were scattered throughout a number of government agencies and 2) despite their being public, Congressional intervention was sometimes required for their release. The new data were gathered by CFIC's Task Force on Federal Judicial Selection.

"We're a bipartisan organization," said Thomas Sargentich, reporter for the task force and professor of law at the Washington College of Law at The American University. "We have no political agenda. We'll gather the data and let the chips fall where they may."

The **Constitution Project** seeks to develop bipartisan solutions to contemporary constitutional and legal issues by combining high-level scholarship and public education.