

Public Relations for Interact



Public relations is important to Interact's strength. It helps raise awareness of Interact — what it is and what it does — in the community and beyond. Through the news media and other channels, you can help promote Interact's positive image and the efforts of Interactors in your area! The following guidelines and tips can be shared with Rotarians, advisers, and others who participate in the program. Involving Interactors in public relations activities can be a great way to get them to learn more about Rotary and their community.



The news media is an important component of public relations. It is fast, local, and reaches many people at once. Local newspapers, magazines, television programs, and other media can help to bring your Interact message directly to the general public. Interact stories have a publicity advantage because the media is partial to examples of youth working to serve their communities. In addition, the PR efforts can also be directed to the sponsoring Rotary club, other organizations and people directly affected by the club's service initiatives. Spread the word about Interact's good work!

There are several ways to take your story to the media. Whatever your approach, be persuasive, persistent, and friendly — but not aggressive. The journalist's preference will determine the best methods.

- **Phone:** Some editors like a brief (under one minute) phone description of your story and reasons why their audience might be interested. They can tell you if they want more information.
- **Mail:** Mail is best for sending non-pressing stories. Send a one-page letter with your background materials.
- **Fax/E-mail:** Inexpensive and fast, these are good methods of sending information directly to the newsroom, but they have their limitations. Most reporters discourage unsolicited faxes and e-mails. Check to find out acceptable methods for your targeted publications.

Quick tips:

- ❖ Keep an up-to-date media list. Personalize your materials as much as possible.
- ❖ Contact the media only with newsworthy story ideas.
- ❖ Contact them in advance of events.
- ❖ Call reporters during times other than deadline — mornings are usually best.
- ❖ When talking to reporters be brief and stick to the point.
- ❖ Know your story and anticipate questions.
- ❖ Avoid asking reporters if they received your release or if they intend to use it.
- ❖ Send background materials immediately following contact.
- ❖ Be available. Make sure you are available to take journalists' calls if they need more information or want to check a fact for accuracy.
- ❖ Always work within a reporter's deadlines.
- ❖ When you send out information to the press, make sure everyone involved is informed.
- ❖ Take "no" for an answer. Arguing with reporters only alienates them.



INTERACT NEWS RELEASE



The news or press release is the most common public relations tool. Newspapers welcome news releases and sometimes print them verbatim. Two key factors in sending out effective news releases are timelines and a local angle.

Submitting the News Release

(Note: Do not send more than one news release at a time for a single news outlet.)

- Review and note the style and format of **Writing the News Release**.
- Add a club contact person to the top of the page. Make sure this person is available to respond to any media inquiries.
- Call the newspaper/magazine for the assignment editor's contact information.
- Allow enough time to get your document there — at least 3-4 days before the scheduled event.
- Mail, e-mail, or fax the news release to the assignment editor.
- Follow up with the assignment editor the following day after faxing, or e-mailing, or three days after mailing, to check the status of the submission. (Call before 2 p.m.)

Writing the News Release

Keep the following questions in mind when writing a release:

- Who should be interested? Why?
- What is our goal in publicizing this event?
- Why should the media be interested?
- What is the media looking for?
- Does this story fit into a current news trend?

Heading—The heading should be brief and tell your story in one sentence.

Interact club to collect supplies for needy Mexican village

First paragraph(s) —Who? What? Where? When? Why?

Members of the Interact club of Jefferson High School will be collecting toys, clothing, blankets and other essentials to provide to residents of the village of Cerro Azul, Mexico during the month of May.

Body of the release (two or three paragraphs only) — Description of the event.

Cerro Azul, a hillside community near Tecate, is made up of families who live in small shacks or sheds without furniture, electricity or running water. The residents' primary source of income is brickmaking, but they have no kilns, so bricks must be sun-dried in a field. A sudden rainstorm can destroy a family's entire livelihood.

Donations may be left in bags at a drop-off center at the school. Members of the Interact club will prepare the collected goods for shipping next month.

Closing — Sponsors and volunteers: Who is involved.

Interact is a Rotary-sponsored nonprofit, nonpolitical, international service organization of secondary school age youth. There are more than 9,000 Interact clubs in 113 countries with some 206,000 members. The Interact Club of Jefferson High School is sponsored by the Rotary Club of Jefferson County.

Rotary is an organization of business and professional leaders united worldwide who provide humanitarian service, and help to build goodwill and peace in the world. There are approximately 1.2 million Rotarians who are members of more than 31,000 Rotary clubs in 166 countries.

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Important Notes:

- Include a “boilerplate.” This is a standard definition of Interact that answers the question, “What is Interact?” This should be in every press release you write: “Interact is a Rotary-sponsored nonprofit, nonpolitical, international service organization of secondary school age youth. There are more than 9,000 Interact clubs in 113 countries with some 206,000 members.”
- Always include Web site and national contact number.
- Make sure contact name and date are at the top of your release.
- Include #### at the end of the release to indicate “the end” in media shorthand.
- Photographs — a picture is worth a thousand words. If you have an interesting photo, send it with your press release. Generally, photos should contain five people or less. Include names of everyone in the photo and how they relate to the press release.



PHOTOGRAPHS



Visuals are essential to journalism. Some newspapers and magazines welcome photographs and visuals from outside sources, and sometimes, a picture can improve the likelihood for your article being published. When taking a photograph, be creative. An action shot is much more exciting than a group of people staring at the camera. Take pictures that show action, tell a story, and convey the purpose of Interact.

- ❖ Hands-on photos — Interactors working in the community — work best.
- ❖ Interactors working on a service project or working with children are recommended.
- ❖ Try to include the Interact or Rotary emblem in the photo—either on a sign or on clothing. Subtle but clear signage is best.
- ❖ See Interact Photo Gallery for examples of Interactors at work:
<http://www.rotary.org/programs/interact/participate/gallery.html>



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



A letter to the editor is a great way to educate the community on Interact activities and Rotary's good work in promoting international goodwill. The editorial page is generally one of the most well-read sections of the newspaper and is likely to reach many people.

The current global atmosphere has left many thinking about the future of international relations. This is a good time to emphasize Rotary's goal of world understanding and peace and Interact's involvement in working to achieve this objective. Interactors are encouraged to spread the word about their involvement in attaining these goals through Interact club projects by writing a letter to the editor of their local newspaper.

- ❖ Call your local newspaper/magazine to get submission information for the editorial page. This information might also be available on the publication's Web site.
- ❖ Mail, e-mail, or fax your letter to the editor and you may follow-up on the status of your submission.

For more information on Public Relations please visit the RI web site at <http://www.rotary.org/membership/prtools/index.html> or e-mail prtips@rotaryintl.org.

Additional information on Interact is available on the RI Web Site at <http://www.rotary.org/programs/interact/index.html> or email interact@rotaryintl.org.