# Using News Releases To Promote Your Public Report: Strategic Considerations

## Purpose

News releases are a standard element in traditional media relations. While historic notions about the media are changing (see the considerations in Resource 1a), it is still a good idea to produce a conventional news release each time your Collaborative unveils a new or updated public report or has other announcements to make.

## Considerations

* **Your news release has more than one purpose**. Ideally, you may want print (hardcopy, online) and broadcast (radio, TV) reporters to pick up the news release and use it verbatim for their coverage of your public report, but this rarely happens. That being said, a news release does increase the chances that reporters and health writers have a common understanding of the main points you want to communicate about your public report. When you produce your news release, email it with the title of the release in the subject line. Also post it as a page on your Web site. You may want to consider low-cost email services such as Constant Contact® (www.constantcontact.com.) to more easily send mass emails and newsletters to audiences interested in receiving your news. By distributing your news release far and wide, you can achieve several goals:
* **Announce your news to reporters and other health writers.** This is the primary purpose of any news release. Some reporters will do their own research to develop a story based on your news release. Busy writers who work for community newspapers or smaller publications may simply take the content of your news release, if it is written in a way that fits with their publication style, and reprint it nearly verbatim. Keep a list of email addresses of health care writers from places such as local daily newspapers, community newspapers, TV and radio stations, national publications (e.g., *Modern Healthcare*), and partner organizations such as associations, employers, and health plans. Email your news releases to this list.
* **Announce your news to community partners.** Be sure to email your news releases to your board of directors, Collaborative partners, committee members, and elected officials (city, township, county, State, and Federal congressional delegation) to keep them informed of your Collaborative’s activities and progress. Maintain an email list of these contacts for easy communication.
* **Create an archive of progress made by your Collaborative.** People providing support or funding to your Collaborative want to know that their effort results in progress to improve health care quality. The path forward involves many milestones, large and small. Creating news releases about big steps (e.g., publishing a public report) and interim steps (e.g., reaching consensus over data sharing or quality improvement) and posting them to your Web site documents your Collaborative’s progress. For interim news, sometimes the value of a news release is to add to the archive, rather than expecting reporters to pick up the story.
* **Increase the search engine ranking of your Web site.** Create a new page on your Web site that has the text of your news release in html format. Don’t just link it as a PDF or other document. Hyperlink any mentions of the public report or organizations named in the news release. This will increase the likelihood that someone typing certain terms into a search engine will come across your news release and Web site. It may also improve your ranking in search engines such as Bing, Google, and Yahoo.
* **Think of reporters as meta-consumers.** Many reporters and health writers are consumers who happen to be professional communicators to the general public. If your report is interesting to consumers, it will likely be interesting to these reporters. If your report or materials are confusing or not relevant to the general public, it will be harder to get reporters interested. Before you write your news release, realistically assess how your report is relevant to what consumers care about (not what *you* think they *should* care about). Ask questions such as: Based on the content of the report, how will consumers use it? Will the report make their lives easier or solve a problem for them? One way to get reporters’ attention is to take a human interest approach to your media pitch by showing how the report makes a difference to a person in your local community (see below).
* **Make an individual “pitch” to a specific reporter or publication.** Some reporters have an area of expertise or angle (e.g., human interest or stories about people) and some publications have a specific type of audience (e.g., business journals). To increase the likelihood that they will write a story about your report, identify in advance the reason that reporter’s particular audience will find your public report interesting. For example:
* **A business-oriented publication** may be interested in issues such as the rising cost of health care; the economic imperative and promise from improving health care quality; the value of having a productive and healthy workforce; the public-private partnership surrounding the creation of the public report; or the collaboration among groups who might otherwise be at odds (e.g., large employers at the table working with union leaders, providers with health plans, everyone together).
* A reporter who writes **human interest stories** may be interested in issues such as the effect on patients or consumers of not having useful information comparing the quality of care in the community; or the “before and after” experiences of a particular patient or consumer as he or she chooses to get care from a clinic that has quality improvement efforts in place. This is also a great way to help a clinic showcase how they’ve improved patient engagement and attention to providing care that is recommended in the public report.
* **Consider content carefully.** A news release is intended to translate the work of the Collaborative into language that is easily understood by people who have no medical training and who do not work in health care quality improvement. Use plain language (see [www.plainlanguage.gov](http://www.plainlanguage.gov)). Avoid jargon, acronyms, and insider phrases such as referring to the report content or results as “measures”; to most consumers, that is a verb, not a noun. Talk about quality improvement in ways that consumers understand.
* **Stick to standard format structure.** While the media is changing, some conventions are easy to follow and will make your news release straightforward and effective. Most important is to come up with a title or subject that is clear and a first paragraph that is short and describes the meat of the news. These two things are often the only elements a reporter skims before deciding whether to read or toss your news release. If possible, keep the release to no more than two pages: put technical information on your Web site and link to it in the news release. Use a standard format: contact information at the top, hyperlink to the name of the report and any organizations mentioned. Put “– more –“ at the bottom when there is another page and “###”at the end of the release.

See Toolkit Resource 5b for a news release template to announce the public release of a report comparing various aspects of local health care quality. Even if you change the content, the template will give you a good idea of the standard format of a standard news release.