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# Publicity!

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**HOW YOU CAN PUBLICIZE VOLUNTEERISM  
AND NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK IN YOUR  
COMMUNITY**

**Janet Lautenschlager**

VOLUNTARY ACTION DIRECTORATE

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## PREFACE

The tradition of voluntarily helping individuals, communities and causes represents the very best in the Canadian legacy — a tradition that remains alive and well today. Nevertheless, to ensure that the spirit of volunteerism continues to thrive in communities across the country, it must be continually nourished through increased recognition and public awareness of the vital role played by volunteers.

The Voluntary Action Directorate supports the growth and diversity of the voluntary sector in Canada through promotion of the concept of volunteerism. This guide to media publicity through the media has been developed to help smaller volunteer centres and other voluntary organizations publicize activities promoting volunteerism at the community level during National Volunteer Week and throughout the year.

To help small organizations approach their local media, we have included samples news releases, media advisories, and public service announcements, as well as fact sheets on National Volunteer Week and on volunteerism in Canada. These materials can be adapted to highlight the special needs and issues of your community.

This guide to publicity is a companion to *Promoting Volunteerism* (published by the Voluntary Action Directorate in the summer of 1991) which takes a broader look at strategies and approaches to promoting volunteerism. For detailed reference tools on public relations, publicity, media relations, community relations and public education, we refer you to the list of manuals and guides in *Promoting Volunteerism*. This annotated list also contains information on where to buy or borrow these materials.

We welcome readers' comments on this resource book, and encourage suggestions on other types of resources that would be useful for promoting volunteerism at the community level. Please contact us at:

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# 1

## THE IMPORTANCE OF PROMOTING VOLUNTEERISM

Canadians have a long tradition of helping individuals, communities and causes. Yet this sense of responsibility for the well-being of our fellow citizens and the quality of life in our communities must be continually nourished.

We cannot afford to assume that there will always be enough volunteers. Nor can we assume that volunteering is a self-perpetuating activity. Recent studies have suggested that most people do not necessarily consider volunteer work as a retirement or leisure option.

We need to strive continually to reinforce the volunteer spirit in Canada by nurturing current volunteers, whether new or seasoned, and by encouraging others to become involved. It is also crucial to instill the concept of volunteering and community service as a way of life for all citizens, particularly for our children and youth who will form the volunteer corps of the future.

The first step in achieving these goals is to publicly recognize the work accomplished by volunteers, not only during National Volunteer Week but also through year-round promotion. Public recognition of volunteer work will make Canadians more aware of the vital role volunteers play in our society and of the critical need to ensure the constant availability of qualified and dedicated volunteers.

Historically, female homemakers were the mainstay of the volunteer force, particularly in the human services. However, since women are entering the labour market in increasing numbers, the availability of the "traditional" volunteer has decreased markedly. In the 1990s, it is both essential and desirable for voluntary organizations to reach out to a much broader pool of potential volunteers. For example, strategies which target members of ethnocultural groups will eventually result in the creation of a volunteers base that more accurately reflects the multicultural and multiracial reality of Canada.

Recent years have also seen shrinking government support for human services in response to severe fiscal constraints. This situation has had a great impact on the

demand for volunteer services. The need for volunteers to address urgent needs and pressing social issues is growing at an alarming rate, and this is putting enormous pressure on volunteer centres and other voluntary organizations across the country.

Today, more than ever, we need to ensure that the volunteer force across Canada continues to grow and that its members are properly placed, trained, managed and recognized. Volunteers are a precious commodity — too precious to be taken for granted.

## 2

### KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL PUBLICITY

#### **The difference between promotion and publicity**

Promotion is communication designed to capture public interest and to gain recognition, understanding and support for an organization, a service, or a cause. It can involve printing a poster, mailing out brochures, handing out flyers, posting notices throughout your community, setting up an exhibit in a shopping mall, hanging a banner across your main street, displaying a window card in a store, or giving a speech. Promotion includes both advertising and publicity.

The component of promotion that deals with “free” exposure through the media is known as publicity. While unlike advertising, you do not have to pay for time and space, you do have to earn coverage by supplying appealing and newsworthy information of public interest.

The designation of a special time during the year, such as National Volunteer Week, provides a ready-made publicity vehicle. Publicity is all the information about the Week and about the work of volunteers in your community that you can get before the public through newspapers, radio and television. This includes such activities as news announcements about your special event, stories about the recipients of a volunteer award, feature articles about issues and trends in volunteerism, a letter to the editor or an editorial on the critical need for volunteers, an appearance on a radio interview program, and a video-taped story on a television news show.

The purpose of National Volunteer Week is twofold: to recognize and thank volunteers and, equally important, to promote volunteering by making it more visible to the general public. When you attract public attention to celebrations during the Week and the accomplishments of volunteers in your community, you are also increasing public understanding of the contribution that volunteers make to your community and to Canadian society.

## **Publicizing National Volunteer Week and local promotional events**

You are planning a special event to promote National Volunteer Week, and it is taking a lot of work. However, if everything goes well *and* if your story is told in print and on the airwaves, all that hard work will pay handsome dividends in promoting volunteerism in your community.

The best way to increase attendance at your event and to ensure coverage in the media is to launch a publicity campaign. Advance planning and attention to detail are essential ingredients in a successful publicity campaign. However, before you develop your news release and other promotional material, you must know whom to contact, what approach to take, and what your deadlines are. Good planning will always pay off.

One of your prime tasks in promoting volunteerism involves “personalizing” the issue — that is, interpreting the vital importance of volunteer work to the public by connecting it with the lives of the people in your community. Since a publicity campaign usually needs a central theme to make it effective, it is advisable to try to find a more focused topic than volunteerism in general. Remember that human interest stories are usually the most appealing. And, the language and point of view you use in both written and face-to-face communications must be chosen to suit the priorities and interests of the media people you are addressing.

### **Planning for success**

Publicity should be a very deliberate process, with every move carefully thought out well in advance. A well planned publicity strategy can save you many headaches and, most importantly, will help you come out ahead in the competition for scarce newspaper space and air time. Timing is crucial in the distribution of materials for the media since their deadlines are fixed.

The main steps in developing your plan are as follows:

1. Set up your committee.
2. Determine responsibilities of each committee member; assign one person to make all the media contacts.
3. Establish your publicity goals, the overall theme and specific messages for your campaign (e.g., the economic contribution of volunteers; the vital services provided by community volunteers; the urgent need for volunteers in human services).

4. Figure out what publicity tools you will be using (e.g., news release, media kit, invitation to media representatives to cover your special event, public service announcement, pre-written article, photographs, letter to the editor).
5. Map out your timetable with specific target dates for each activity or action required (allow ample lead time since each publicity effort is often more time-consuming than it appears).
6. Draw up a media list and identify the contacts who are most likely to be interested in your message.
7. Develop the materials needed to interest key media contacts in your story.
8. Approach key media contacts.
9. Follow up by sending a thank you note if your material was used, reiterating the worthiness of your cause. If your material was not used, consider calling the editor, reporter, producer or program manager and try to find out why (for future guidance).

### **Finding the angle**

National Volunteer Week and events to recognize volunteers and promote volunteerism will probably not be considered fast-breaking, “hard” news that would run on the front page of a newspaper or be a focus of news broadcasts on radio or television. Most likely, your publicity will involve feature and human interest stories. Yet, even this so-called “soft” news has to be newsworthy to warrant special attention. This means that the story must contain facts that really inform, must be objective, and must have a “hook”.

The “hook” is the most important thing in a news release and is, in fact, what justifies its release. The hook is what the rest of the story hangs on: it is the focus, the main point, the unusual idea, or the explanation of how the story will have an impact on the audience.

The commonplace is not news. If you come up with a unique or unusual angle, you will greatly increase your chances for media coverage for your special event. For example, although a traditional pancake breakfast may not be particularly interesting to the media, a pancake breakfast served by local dignitaries and celebrities to community volunteers might be.

Similarly, feature stories call for imagination because they do not draw their interest purely from the fact that something has happened or is going to happen. For instance, if you have a human interest story that you believe is worth telling, you could add a new slant to the statistics by calculating the cost to the community if no one was

willing to volunteer. (You can calculate this figure for the number of people in your community by using the average volunteer participation rate for the country as a whole or for your province based on the findings of the National Survey of Volunteer Activity in Canada and the average wage in the service sector).

As a general rule, the local appeal will help ensure media coverage — local statistics, local volunteer heroes, local dignitaries. Since National Volunteer Week is community based, this is a natural approach.

Try to put yourself in the place of a news editor or program director. The more you help media people do their job, the better your chance of success in your own job. It is the business of the media to capture and hold the attention of their audience (whether readers, listeners or viewers), and they are constantly seeking to uncover and write about the unusual. Unusual service, unusual performance, unusual tasks: these are some of the things that will make good copy. You can make it as easy as possible for them by suggesting viable hooks for stories.

Here are some possible stories and story angles that might be appropriate and interesting ways to promote volunteerism:

- profiles of outstanding volunteers (the work they have accomplished and how it has benefited an individuals or the community; a day in their life as a volunteer; an unusual type of volunteer activity);
- portraits of individual clients (for example, recent immigrants, elderly citizens, seriously disabled people, children “at risk”) and how volunteers have made a difference in their lives;
- a profile of an highly effective volunteer program that you run (particularly if it is a major anniversary year for the program);
- a profile of an innovative volunteer program that you run (for example, one that encourages the participation of ethnocultural minorities, people with disabilities, youth or seniors); and
- a historical look at the role and contribution of volunteers in your community (particularly if it is a major anniversary year for your municipality).

If your local television station has just done a mini documentary on youth in trouble with the law, you might suggest to the producer a special feature on outstanding volunteers in your community who are actively involved with the criminal justice system. If family violence is a topic that has been receiving a lot of attention in your local paper recently, you might want to send a letter to the editor to singling out the volunteers who work with the local women's shelter and abused children to thank them and explain the impact of their work. (The anonymity of the volunteers, however, should always be maintained.)

Research on the substance and reflection on the value behind story ideas will

allow you to put together enough background information to make the story attractive to the largest number of media outlets. Remember to use a human interest angle wherever possible and to obtain permission from individuals (whether the volunteers or those they help) before you use their names in any publicity material.

## **Telling the story**

“Copy” is the backbone of publicity. Copy is the text of a news or feature article, a captioned photograph, a letter for publication, the script for a broadcast. Whatever form it takes, the story must be told in the most direct and simple language possible.

A **news release** is the cornerstone of a publicity campaign and one of the most important sources of information available to the media. It is generally used to offer a factual or straightforward news story, such as an announcement of a special event or the release of an important new study. While major papers may not rely heavily on news releases, a significant portion of the local news that appears in community newspapers has been gleaned by editors from the news releases they receive. However, much of the success of a news release, even a very well written one on a truly newsworthy topic, depends on whether it was received by the right person at the right time.

A **media advisory** is a shorter version of the news release intended to flag the possibility of news rather than to tell a story. It could be used, for example, to alert all media within your community to the fact that National Volunteer Week is approaching.

A **feature release** offers the media, particularly a newspaper, a pre-written story that can be used with minimum effort. It offers the news hook that will give the story a human interest twist. Although not hard news, a feature release still needs the element of timeliness, new significance, or relevance to a current topic.

A **public service announcement (PSA)** is a message of interest to the community or the general public for which the media donate air time or space. This is one of the most common forms of publicity for voluntary organizations because PSAs are run at no cost to the group. However, you have no control over when and where your PSA will appear. While it might be an audiotaped or videotaped production similar to a commercial broadcast, it is also possible to get a lot of air time by distributing PSA scripts, known in the field as “live copy”, for announcers to read. Almost all radio stations and some television stations use this format.

A **community calendar listing** is a mention in the media along with other events taking place around the same time. It is shorter than a PSA and gives fewer details.

A **backgrounder** provides explanatory and additional information in a brief, concise and easily readable fashion.

A **fact sheet** serves much the same purpose as a backgrounder. It might be a brief overview of your organization and its role in promoting volunteerism, a statement on the

purpose of National Volunteer Week with a summary of its history, a statement of the purpose and history of a special volunteer award, or key facts on volunteerism.

A **media kit** serves to provide all the background that reporters and producers may need to develop a story, including background and biographical information. A media kit for National Volunteer Week might contain:

- ✓ a news release or media advisory
- ✓ background information on the Week (purpose, history, role of the volunteer centres, etc.) and on activities within your community to promote the Week
- ✓ a fact sheet citing key statistics on volunteerism, focusing on local information as much as possible
- ✓ highlights of the key trends and issues in volunteerism today
- ✓ biographies of volunteers being honoured
- ✓ suggestions for stories; an outline for a feature story; pre-written messages of thanks to community volunteers
- ✓ photographs of volunteers in action that relate to your news release or your proposed feature; 5x7 or 8x10 inch black and white glossies with a brief caption attached. These could be taken by a good amateur photographer.
- ✓ an annotated list of key sources on volunteerism that you could make available on short notice
- ✓ a backgrounder on your organization and its activities (for example, the number of volunteers and of individuals or groups served).

Don't forget to add your name, title (if appropriate) and telephone number.

### **Taking stock of your media resources**

Your first step in organizing a publicity campaign is to take an inventory of all of the possible channels of communication to the public that are available to you. Begin by compiling a complete media list for your community, including neighbourhood newspapers or bulletins, regional weeklies or monthlies, shopper giveaways, campus radio stations and cable television stations. If the telephone book does not give a complete list, ask for assistance at the reference desk of your local library. For example, *The Matthews List*, published in Toronto by Canadian Corporate News, gives a complete list of the main media across the country and is updated regularly.

Your next step is to study all of the media outlets on your master list to learn their interests and emphasis and to judge the potential interest of each in your publicity. Become an avid media watcher and study what types of items each of your potential markets prefer. For newspapers, take note of stories that relate to your organization's

sphere of interest and monitor the editorial pages, letters to the editors and the columns. Learn what types of stories are used in the various sections. Become familiar with the content, style and format of news interviews, talk shows, etc. on your local radio and television stations.

Once you have identified those which are most likely to cover your story, create a more detailed list of selected media contacts that you wish to target in your campaign. The more limited your time, the greater the need to focus your energies.

Finally, you will need to create a method for collecting and organizing basic information on the key media resources you have decided to target. Find out to whom at the paper or station you should be addressing each type of publicity tool you are planning, when to send the information or make the personal contact, and how to present your story.

You will need to obtain and regularly update basic information on each of the following:

**for print media:** the name, address, fax and telephone numbers of the feature editor, editorial page editor, city editor, assignments editor, columnists, special writers, calendar editor, editor of Sunday edition, producers of talk shows, producer of public affairs and community-related programming; and

**for radio and TV:** the broadcast schedule, deadlines, lead time required, format preferences for receiving information, length restrictions; audience analysis, areas of specialty or interest.

## Approaching the Media

To keep the approach and the message consistent, contact with the media is best handled by as few people as possible — ideally by *one* person.

Always bear in mind that media people rely on publicists like yourself to help them cover the bases. You are offering them genuine news ideas, and they will appreciate a solid story that is outlined clearly and factually.

Once you have carefully produced your material and identified the key contacts in the media, do you just send the material by mail? Do you call first? Send it and then call? Although there is no accepted protocol on this, the usual advice is to send the material with a brief covering letter that indicates that you will be calling soon.

The most common way to approach media people is to mail them your news release, invitation to a special event or public service announcement. Although this method often gets results, personal contact will usually increase your chances of coverage. In a smaller community, a news release may not even be necessary if more informal, personal lines of communication are available.

Here are some basic guidelines for contacting media people by telephone:

- ☞ Begin by introducing yourself and making sure that you are not catching them at a bad time. Avoid contacting them near deadline time.
- ⌘ Be brief, organized and to the point — and make sure what you have to say is as interesting as possible. Have your script well prepared in advance.
- 👤👤 Be prepared to back up your lead with some precise factual or statistical information and to answer any questions that might come up.
- ⚡? Ask if there are any questions they would like answered or any specific information they would like you to send.
- ➔ Offer to come in for an interview at their convenience.
- ☒ Follow up immediately with a personalized letter and additional information, even if you have already sent some material.

A “pitch” letter, whether used as the first point of contact or to follow up a phone conversation, should be brief and succinct. Open with a strong lead to pique the reader's interest — ideally, a striking fact, startling statistic or controversial question. Then, move straight into the feature story idea, offering several different angles and indicating why the story would be of interest to the audience in question.

Each letter should be tailored to the particular contact person to whom it is directed. If you have already spoken with her/him, add an introductory line referring to your conversation. Be sure to send your letter to a particular named person or, failing that, to the appropriate position (by title). To avoid unnecessary confusion and so to maintain good relations with the media, it is a good principle to clearly indicate to all involved if you are sending the same material to more than one representative of the same paper or station.

Whether telephoning or presenting your material in person, you need to be persuasive, persistent and friendly, but never overly aggressive. Once personal contact has been made, the usual advice is to wait and see.

Editors and program directors always appreciate getting advance notice of stories or events that may interest them, although material submitted too far in advance stands a good chance of getting lost. It is generally advisable to send an advance notice, followed by a second notice as a reminder closer to the actual date.

To increase your chances of obtaining valuable feedback, include a self-addressed, stamped reply card with your publicity materials, especially if your only contact is by mail. Ask people to check boxes to let you know:

- if and when they used the piece;
- if they would like more information by mail;
- if they would like you to call them to give them further information.

If reporters are covering a special event, they will welcome handouts that give details of the program, including the names and phone numbers of those responsible and the text of important speeches.

Call a news conference only if you have something of regional, national, or international significance to announce.

And, finally, it is always a good practice to express your appreciation of good coverage by sending a thank-you note to the reporter or broadcaster with a copy to his or her superior. If possible, try to include information about community reaction to your item that you received.

## **Getting into print**

For publicity at the local level, newspapers are likely your best bet. There is scarcely a city, town or neighbourhood that is not covered by at least one newspaper, and almost everybody reads them. While more and more people look to radio and television as their major source of hard news and current events, they continue to rely on newspapers for local news and human interest stories about people and events in their community.

The demand for interesting information and good local news stories needed to fill a newspaper is almost insatiable, particularly in a weekly or monthly dedicated to community news. Names of local people and local organizations are magic words in your hometown or neighbourhood press (for example, a local citizen who is being honoured for volunteer work or a major event sponsored by a community organization).

Newspapers also offer the opportunity for in-depth treatment of a subject. With

the larger papers, you will have to be aware of which particular section of the paper might be most responsive to and effective for your story. For example, the business section might be appropriate to highlight a corporate volunteer program or an outstanding member of a volunteer board. The family section may be a good place to profile volunteers who work with children or advocate for children's rights. The lifestyle or living sections often deal with social issues and usually contain longer feature articles. The sports section might carry an article on volunteers who coach little league teams or a well-known sports figure who does a great deal of community service.

One of the most widely read sections of a newspaper is the letters to the editor column. These letters usually raise new points about issues in the news, direct attention to a problem, or respond to a column or editorial. Since most papers publish letters from their readers, a letter to the editor of your local paper is one effective way of getting an issue-related message before the public.

While a small paper may print a letter that simply announces National Volunteer Week and thanks community volunteers, you have a good chance of having your letter printed in any paper if you can tie your purpose to a an issue current attracting interest in your community. A letter to the editor should be brief, clearly written and focused.

You might also consider a newspaper op-ed (i.e., an article in a special section opposite the editorial page) which can also be used to give public applause for outstanding achievement. While gaining editorial support may be a challenging feat, this is an excellent way to gain public attention and support. Try writing to ask for a meeting with a member of the paper's editorial board.

Ask editors about the advisability of submitting photographs of your events or about the possibility of them sending a photographer.

Remember that the range of local print media in a community extends beyond daily, weekly and neighbourhood newspapers. Many communities have a variety of additional papers that are regularly read by significant sectors of the community and should thus be reviewed carefully. These include:

- community magazines and newsletters
- “shoppers” which are supported by advertisers and given out free of charge
- newspapers targeting a specific ethnocultural community
- college and university newspapers
- newsletters of service clubs and other voluntary organizations
- religious newspapers and newsletters
- newsletters published by a local company
- major dailies from other cities that circulate in your community and might be interested in providing special coverage for outlying areas
- newsletters circulated by the municipal government or local politicians.

## Getting on air

The potential of radio and television coverage in a given locality varies according to the population served and the practices of the station. The electronic media usually have more smaller but more definable target audiences than newspapers. Since radio programming is cheaper to produce and requires less preparation, it is generally easier to get on radio than on television with PSAs, interviews, talk shows and the like. The best stations or programs to target are those that pride themselves on a high profile within the community.

In considering radio or television as a medium for your message, it is important to keep your material immediate. A good test of immediacy is whether you can work the words “today”, “yesterday” or “tomorrow” into your material.

The following avenues offer an opportunity for on-air coverage during National Volunteer Week:

- public affairs programs (e.g., feature interviews with an outstanding volunteer receiving an award, an expert in trends and issues in volunteerism, the coordinator of a major special event)
- public service announcements
- news programs featuring local news
- editorials
- call-in or open-line shows.

Because resources and priorities differ greatly among stations, it is a good idea to make direct contact with the program director (or the public service director in a larger station) to learn firsthand what kinds of community service activities the station supports and what other types of programming might be appropriate outlets for promoting volunteerism.

If you are interested specifically in news coverage, the news director is your best contact at the station. Most radio and television news programs have assignment editors who decide what stories will be covered. The credits at the end of the show will indicate their names.

Some local radio and television stations are willing to take up a particular cause as part of their public service commitment. This might involve sponsoring a special event or devoting a larger than usual amount of airtime to a cause during a specific period. Some radio station will offer services free of charge or at reduced rates to a voluntary group to produce a public service message.

A very effective, and often achievable, opportunity for radio and television coverage lies with the established personalities on public affair programs, talk shows and news programs who have built-in audiences.

Another form of corporate support is for the station to lend the name and prestige of station personalities to community events as honorary chairperson, keynote speaker, and so on. However, a possible disadvantage of aligning your activities too closely with one station is that the rest of the media may choose to downplay or ignore your promotional efforts.

In addition to commercial stations, campus radio stations are an important media resource to consider. As these stations are nonprofit, community service undertakings and tend to function largely with the assistance of volunteers, they may be very sympathetic to the goals of National Volunteer Week. Also, cable television and local non-commercial radio are part of the growing community-access phenomenon in the broadcast field and should be investigated.

# 3

## THE MECHANICS OF PUBLICITY MATERIALS

### The Basics

There are certain style and presentation requirements that you should observe when submitting news releases and other publicity material to the media. Here are the main points to remember:

- Your material must be written clearly and concisely, typed neatly and reproduced cleanly.
- Keep the text objective. Personal opinions and editorial comments should take the form of a direct quote from a key person.
- Strive for absolute accuracy; proofread carefully and double check the spelling of names, figures and facts.
- Always give the name, telephone and fax number of the contact person and the issue date.
- Use standard letter-size, white paper. Type in a standard font, double-spaced with wide margins (so that your text is easy to read and edit). Type or photocopy on only one side of the sheet.
- Use letterhead paper or create a masthead for your material to make it easily identifiable and give it a professional appearance (your organization's logo or the NVW logo). This can be done using desktop publishing.

Writing publicity materials for the media also requires a knowledge of several different formats, each of which serves a particular function.

### Preparing your news release

Your release should start with a heading that gives the name and address of your organization. Instructions for the release should appear in the upper right-hand corner

(e.g., “RELEASE ON SATURDAY, APRIL 25” or “FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE”). The name and telephone number (preferably both business and home numbers) of the contact person should appear at the bottom on the left side, with the date on the right. A typical news release for a special event will also identify a special speaker, celebrity or a member of your organization such as the president or event chairperson.

A well chosen headline will give the readers a quick overview of the story being communicated and pique their interest.

Your news release should be structured in what is known as an “inverted pyramid” to help busy editors or news directors spot the vital information easily and decide quickly whether they are interested in the story. The crucial information goes at the beginning so that editors can shorten the piece from the bottom up.

The first, or lead, paragraph provides the most important facts, generally in one or two sentences. The lead is developed in the body, generally in one or two paragraphs, giving additional information in descending order of importance. The release should end with brief paragraph that sums up or contains additional details of lesser importance.

Use the time-honoured formula to present your story: “who”, “what”, “where”, and “when” and possibly also “why” and “how” (but not necessarily in this order). Most of these points will go in the lead paragraph. Then, give prominence to the most important element (for example, the “who” if a well known person is involved and the “what” if it is an unusual or first-ever type of event). A good news release will sound as if its has been lifted from a newspaper.

Keep your news release clear, concise and brief. Use simple, direct language, relatively short sentences and paragraphs, and active verbs. Use adjectives and adverbs sparingly. Make every word count — and give it punch.

Ideally, a news release is a single page; it should never be longer than two pages. If your release goes to the second page, number the pages and put “MORE” at the end of the first page and add a few words at the top of the next page that identifies the release. Wherever possible, end the page with a complete paragraph. To indicate the end of the release, add “END”, “# # #” or “-30 -” in the centre of the page as the last line.

If more than one major event is planned, prepare a different release for each event and send them separately to your media contacts.

It is a good idea to read your news release aloud to test it for an on-air reading. Make sure there are no words that are difficult to pronounce or awkward phrases. Ideally, a news release written specifically for the broadcast media is desirable to ensure that it is written for the voice rather than the eye (i.e., has a conversational tone).

Depending on the type of announcement, a photograph might increase your chances for publicity. For example, a 5x7 inch black and white glossy of volunteer award winners, with a caption identifying the individuals from left to right, might be effective when sending an announcement to the local print media.

A news release should normally arrive about seven to ten days prior to the event.

## **Preparing your media advisory**

A media advisory presents only the basic facts in a one-page, double-spaced format:

- ✓ the name of the organization
- ✓ the name of the event
- ✓ the date and place of the event
- ✓ the name and telephone number of the person to contact for more information.

Since a media advisory is intended to alert the media to an up-coming event or special week, it should be sent out well in advance (about four weeks). If you are not following up with a news release, you should send out a second notice about two weeks before the event or special week.

## **Preparing a feature release**

A feature release is creative writing with an informational or editorial purpose. An effective feature release requires a sense of the dramatic. The story should be told with style and verbal impact.

The headline must capture the reader's attention. A strong opening is as important here as it is in a news release, and so is the ending. The piece opens with an interesting paragraph and then develops the theme through the body of the text. The final paragraph is more than a summary; it is the clincher. A one-liner, a powerful quote or a short anecdote can make either a strong beginning or a strong close.

A typical feature story about an award winner, such as the recipient of a distinguished volunteer award, would include information on the person's history with your organization, and community involvement, as well as on family and/or professional life. The text should be accompanied by a 5x7 inch black and white photograph of the individual with a typed caption. If possible, this should be an action shot showing the individual volunteering.

Never send the very same feature story to competing newspapers or competing stations. Rewrite each article with a different slant and with quotations by different people. Since each article is then unique, you are able to mark each one as "EXCLUSIVE TO (name of media outlet)".

A feature release that is tied to a specific time frame, such as National Volunteer Week, should arrive at least two weeks ahead of time. In the case of a follow-up story that focuses on the success of an event, it should be hand-delivered or faxed immediately

after the event.

### **Placing PSAs to your best advantage**

A public service announcement (PSA) is usually run in off hours since advertising is sold for primetime periods. Nevertheless, they still reach a considerable audience, and competition for airtime is keen. Since PSAs are short, some stations prefer to have their own announcers read them instead playing tapes.

Before you begin, it is best to check with the public service director or program director of your radio and television stations to find out whether they have any special policies about PSAs. Some stations reserve PSA time for on-going activities and public education efforts, and cover one-time events in a community calendar; others will use PSAs for single events as well.

Choose one main point and make sure that everything in the script supports, clarifies or elaborates on the main thrust. Try to find a strong lead that grabs the audience's attention. Conclude by telling your audience what you want them to do: come to your event, call you, think about the contribution that volunteers make, etc.

PSAs can be dramatic and do not necessarily follow the “who, what, where, when, why” rules of the news release.

Timing must be exact. Scripts should be tested aloud with a stopwatch. Here's a guide to follow for length:

10 seconds	.....	15-20 words
20 seconds	.....	35-40 words
30 seconds	.....	55-75 words
60 seconds	.....	125-150 words

Since not all stations use all of these lengths for their spots, you should find out each station's requirements. If a number of formats are used, it is a good idea to write spots of several different lengths to increase your chances for airtime. Always indicate the word count and the length at the beginning of the script.

When there are specific dates, such as with National Volunteer Week, these should be clearly noted on the PSA script and in the covering letter. Mark the date that you wish the announcement to begin and the date at which it is to be stopped (e.g., "Use between April 20 and May 3, 1992" or "Use until May 3, 1992").

A printed script for on-the-air reading must be short, clear and easy to read. Use simple, descriptive words. Provide a phonetic spelling for unusual names in parentheses following the names. Double or triple-space the text for easier reading. Print one PSA to a page using letterhead. Read your draft out loud to make sure it reads smoothly. You may use contractions (e.g., "don't", "can't").

Include your organization's name and address and the contact person's name and telephone number on all materials. Give a brief title to the PSA.

Since radio stations have well defined audiences, they offer the opportunity for highly selective and specific PSAs. You may wish to consider a variety of different versions for different stations.

When you submit your PSAs, be sure to include a brief, personalized covering letter. Explain why the campaign, event or service you are coordinating is important, how it meets the needs of the people in the station's listening area, and when it is taking place. Include any background information you have prepared.

Deliver your PSA script well in advance of the date that you would like it broadcast. Since the time required to process PSAs varies from station to station (usually from two to four weeks), it is best to verify the lead time required.

### **Community Calendar Listings**

Community calendar items are much shorter than PSAs. They usually run for 10 to 15 seconds and provide only the key facts. Since the lead time will vary from one to eight weeks, depending on the station's policy and size, it is necessary to check with the stations to find out their requirements.

# **APPENDIX**

## **SAMPLES OF PUBLICITY MATERIALS FOR NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK**

# News releases

## Sample 1 with format model

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Anytown Volunteer Centre  
Anytown, Anywhere  
X0X 0X0

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

#### ANYTOWN CELEBRATES NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK: APRIL 26 - MAY 2, 1992

The Anytown Volunteer Centre, in conjunction with local voluntary agencies, has planned special activities to celebrate National Volunteer Week (April 26 to May 2).

A volunteer awards ceremony will take place at the City Hall, with Anna Chekhov of CJJJ Television as the guest speaker. (Anna is a well known personality who has done extensive volunteer work in our community.) Local volunteers to be recognized for their outstanding efforts are: (identify the awards program and list the names of the award recipients and the organization through which they volunteer).

During National Volunteer Week, Anytown Volunteer Centre will also be launching a pilot project that will enable disabled youth to experience a wide variety of volunteer opportunities.

National Volunteer Week is a special week set aside to thank and honour the millions of Canadians who volunteer their services to help individuals, communities and causes.

- END -

For further information, contact:

Ms. Mary Jane Doe  
Office: 765-4321  
Home: 987-6543  
Fax: 765-4322

April 10, 1992

## Sample 2

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### **ANYTOWN TO HONOUR ITS VOLUNTEERS**

The week of April 25 to May 2 has been designated National Volunteer Week — a special time to thank and honour community volunteers across the country. All area residents are invited to take part in the special events to celebrate the Week in Anytown.

Volunteer Anytown will host a reception at the Canadian Inn on April 30 to honour all those who volunteer their time to our many community organizations. The Anytown Board of Education and Volunteer Anytown are co-sponsoring a teen bike-a-thon on May 2 to raise funds for a special volunteer-run program for disabled children. And the Anytown Little Theatre's dramatic production entitled "The Board", a humorous look at life on a volunteer board of directors of a community organization with controversial programs, will run from April 26 to 28.

According to Charles Wong, President of Volunteer Anytown, "We know from a detailed survey carried out by Statistics Canada in 1987 that 27 per cent of Canadians volunteer their services to voluntary organizations. And each of these 5.3 million volunteers donates an average of 191 hours a year. Locally, this means that we have approximately ----- residents who volunteer to address such urgent needs as [cite examples that are particularly important to your community]."

"In economic terms the time donated to volunteering in Anytown each year has a dollar value of about \$---- [based on the average wage in the service sector]", Mr Wong continued. "During National Volunteer Week, we hope to make the public much more aware of this enormous, though largely invisible, contribution to our community."

The local celebrations are part of a nation-wide observance of this special week which is coordinated annually by the 190 local volunteer bureaux/centres across Canada to honour volunteers.

For information on a wide variety of volunteer opportunities available in our community, please contact Volunteer Anytown at 555-9999.

### Sample 3

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#### **MAYOR PROCLAIMS NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK**

“I am delighted to announce that Anytown will be joining communities across the country in celebrating National Volunteer Week from April 26 to May 2, 1992”, said Mayor Melissa Dubé. The Mayor issued a proclamation today to thank the many residents who volunteer their time to help others and to improve the quality of life in Anytown.

The Anytown Volunteer Centre has planned special activities to recognize community volunteers and to celebrate National Volunteer Week. The Mayor will be hosting a reception to honour community volunteers at City Hall on April 28 at 8:00 pm, and the Mayor and the Councillors serving the refreshments. An evening of fun and festivities for all residents of all ages will take place on May 2 at 7:00 pm in the Community Hall. Many voluntary organizations will have special events during the Week to thank their own volunteers.

“Volunteers are involved in virtually every aspect of community life here in Anytown. They offer emotional support to terminally ill patients, coach little league sports teams, run our community theatre and are actively involved in so many other activities. Volunteers play an essential role in ensuring that this community remains a great place to live. That is why it is so very important to publicly recognize the work of our dedicated volunteers during National Volunteer Week — and to make all residents more aware of the scope of volunteer activity here in Anytown”, commented the Mayor.

## Public service announcements for radio

### Sample of a 30-second PSA with format model

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#### PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

#### ANNOUNCER'S COPY

FROM: Volunteer Anytown  
Anytown, Anywhere  
X0X 0X0

CONTACT: Mary Jane Doe (555-4321)

TIME: 30 seconds

LENGTH: 70 words

TO BE AIRED:  
April 20 to May 2

**SUBJECT: National Volunteer Week 1992  
April 26th to May 2nd**

Did you know that April 26th to May 2nd is National Volunteer Week?

During this special week, communities across Canada say thanks to their volunteers.

Why celebrate National Volunteer Week?

Because volunteers are the lifeline of Anytown — the vital link that holds our community together.

Without volunteers, so many programs and services upon which Anytown relies would simply cease to exist.

So, let's all celebrate National Volunteer Week!  
... A public service of [station name].

## **Samples of 10-second PSAs**

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Volunteers — they really are the vital links that hold this community together. Let's celebrate National Volunteer Week!

This is National Volunteer Week. Thank you, volunteers! You make Anytown a truly great place to live.

April 26th to May 2nd is National Volunteer Week. Let's all say a big “thanks” to Anytown's many volunteers!

It's National Volunteer Week — a chance for Anytown to thank all those who volunteer their time and services.

This is National Volunteer Week. Let's take time to thank Anytown's volunteers for the many services they provide.

It's National Volunteer Week. Let's have a big round of applause for Anytown's many dedicated volunteers!

## **Samples of 20-second PSAs**

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Who are the vital links that hold our community together? Volunteers! Why? Because they provide so many essential services that Anytown depends on. So, let's celebrate our community's volunteers. It's National Volunteer Week!

It's National Volunteer Week. Over 5,000 Anytownians do volunteer work. Stand up and be counted. For information on activities during National Volunteer Week or on how to become a volunteer, call the Anytown Volunteer Centre at 555-2222.

Did you know that April 26 to May 2 is a very special week honouring over 5,000 of Anytown's citizens? It's National Volunteer Week — a time to thank all those who volunteer their services to make our community a great place to live.

How many volunteers does it take to make a difference in someone's life? Just one! Imagine the impact that 13 million volunteers have on the quality of life in Canada. It's National Volunteer Week. Think about it!

## **Samples of 30-second PSAs**

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Volunteers are people who care enough to invest their time, their talents and their energy to help make Anytown the best community possible. They work in food banks; they tutor children; they organize fundraisers for charity. And, they do so much more! During National Volunteer Week, think about what volunteers mean to this community.

Because an elderly woman has a special friend to share her life. Because a disabled boy has gained self-esteem playing hockey on a community team. Because a mother is now able to read stories to her children. These are just a few of the reasons why volunteers are so vitally important to life in Anytown. During National Volunteer Week, let's offer a public thanks to Anytown's volunteers.

Rain or shine, Anytown is going to have a big party to honour its volunteers on April 26. This is the opening event of a 7-day celebration of National Volunteer Week. Are you a volunteer? Are you interesting in becoming one? Please join us on Saturday, April 26 at 2:00 p.m. at the Community Hall. For more information, contact the Anytown Volunteer Centre at 555-2222.

# Fact Sheets for media kits

## Sample 1

### **NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK**

- \* During April 26 to May 2, 1992, communities across Canada will be celebrating National Volunteer Week.
- \* The primary purpose of National Volunteer Week is to thank and honour people who donate their time to help fellow citizens and to support the causes they believe in. The Week also serves to reinforce the human values that volunteering represents and to increase public awareness of the vital importance of volunteerism to our communities and to Canadian society in general.
- \* At the community level, activities are organized by the 190 local volunteer bureaux and centres across Canada. In British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario and Quebec, the volunteer centres are supported by associations which coordinate promotional efforts province-wide.
- \* The Canadian Association of Volunteer Bureaux and Centres supports local community efforts and promotes the Week at the national level in partnership with the Voluntary Action Directorate of Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada.
- \* During this Week, many voluntary organizations (local, regional, and national) pay special tribute to their volunteers and recognize outstanding effort.
- \* Local businesses offer their support; corporations serve as official sponsors for the Week at the provincial level. Mayors and local politicians issue proclamations and messages of thanks to community volunteers; the Government of Canada and many provincial governments endorse the Week.
- \* National Volunteer Week was first proclaimed in 1943. In Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg and Vancouver, Women's Voluntary Services organized activities to draw public attention to the critical contributions being made to the war effort by women on the home front.
- \* In the late 1960s, the idea of a special week to honour volunteers was revived, and the focus broadened to include all volunteers in the community. With volunteer centres taking the lead, this special week grew in importance during the 1970s and 1980s. By 1990, the same week in April was proclaimed in all communities across the country, thus firmly establishing National Volunteer Week as the highlight of the year for recognizing the contributions of the millions of Canadians who volunteer.

## Sample 2

### VOLUNTEER FACTS

#### I. THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF VOLUNTEERISM

- \* Some **13 million** Canadians do volunteer work, either on their own or through an organization; **5.3 million** volunteer their time and skills to community groups and other voluntary organizations.
- \* Canadians contribute **over one billion hours** in volunteer time each year to voluntary organizations — the equivalent of 617,000 full-time jobs.
- \* Translated into a dollar equivalent, the collective value of volunteer time is **\$13.2 billion** annually (based on the average wage in the service sector). This amount exceeds the wage bill in major Canadian industries such as forestry, agriculture, or mining and oil.
- \* Through volunteering, many Canadians gain **new skills** that can be transferred directly to the labour market.

#### II. CHARACTERISTICS OF VOLUNTEERS

- \* Women volunteer slightly more than men, although men who volunteer tend to put more actual hours in.
- \* Two-thirds of today's volunteers work outside the home.
- \* “Baby boomers” (35 to 44 years of age) are the most likely to volunteer.
- \* The average volunteer devotes 191 hours a year to volunteer work.
- \* The most common types of volunteer activity are: fundraising, organizing special events, providing information, visiting the sick and elderly, helping with childcare or homemaking services, serving as a member of a board or committee.
- \* The main reason people chose to volunteer is to help others in need or to support a worthy cause. Other considerations include wanting to do something satisfying and to meet new people.

SOURCES: *Economic Dimensions of Volunteer Work in Canada* (Secretary of State, 1990) and *Giving Freely: Volunteers in Canada* (Statistics Canada, 1989), both of which are based on the results of the 1987 National Survey of Volunteer Activity of Canada.

## Sample 3

### CURRENT ISSUES AND TRENDS IN VOLUNTEERISM

- \* The need to strengthen the volunteer base in Canadian communities has become critical. In the present era of severe fiscal restraint, voluntary organizations are under tremendous pressure to meet growing social needs using extremely limited resources.
- \* With an increased demand for volunteers in recent years, the need to strengthen the management of the volunteer base and to provide appropriate training and resources for volunteer workers has become crucial.
- \* Today's volunteers come from a wider range of the population than their counterparts only a decade or two ago, and they have different expectations and motivations. A growing number of professionals, youth and New Canadians now make up the fabric of Canada's volunteer corps. These volunteers are often looking for interesting and challenging assignments, a variety of shorter term volunteer assignments and sense of personal achievement. Many are also seeking skills and experiences that can be transferred to the labour market.
- \* Recruitment strategies that specifically target members of **ethnocultural groups** are becoming more common in voluntary organizations. This will eventually result in the creation of a volunteer base that more accurately reflects the cultural and racial diversity of the Canadian population.
- \* An increasing number of people with **special needs** (e.g., disabled, socially or economically disadvantaged) want to get involved as volunteers. And there is a growing recognition that all citizens have the right to volunteer.
- \* Employers in the corporate sector are developing policies and practices to support and encourage their employees in their volunteer work. **Corporate volunteerism**, in which individuals volunteer under the auspices of the company that employs them, is also taking on greater importance in Canada.

SOURCE: Based on "Canadian Volunteerism in the 1990s" (Canadian Association of Volunteer Bureaux and Centres, February 1991).



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Multiculturalism and Citizenship  
Canada

Pochette gracieuseté de la  
Direction du Soutien aux organismes volontaires

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