

www.archivists.org

Planning an event?
You'll find an Event Planning Guide at
www.archivists.org/archivesmonth

1: Create Your Media List

Media coverage helps get the archives message to a mass audience, and an essential part of event planning is to invite the media to attend. Your media list should include individuals who cover the humanities, human-interest features, and/or community events in newspapers or magazines and for radio and television stations. (Remember to include community newspapers and local cable channels.)

To find local media telephone numbers and addresses,

use the online directories at www.usnpl.com, www.newslink.org, or www.newsdirectory.com. Once on the media outlet's website, use the "contact us" link to scan the list of editors and reporters. You may also call the outlet's main line and ask the receptionist for contact information for the assignment editor of the section to which you are sending the information and the community calendar editor. Also consider targeting the legislative or business media contacts, depending on your topic.

When you call a radio or TV station, ask for the names of the news director, the assignment editor, and the public service director, as well as the producers of specific locally produced talk shows.

To develop and maintain your media list, create a simple Excel spreadsheet that includes columns for Media Outlet and the reporter's

5 Easy Steps for Ensuring Media Coverage of Your Archives Month Event

First Name, Last Name, Email Address, Phone, Fax, Mailing Address, Preference for Receipt of Information (ie, email, fax, mail), and Comments. The last column is where you'll track contacts with the reporter and any need for follow-up.

2: Send Your Media Alert

The media alert (or fact sheet) is an abbreviated version of the news release. This one-page, at-a-glance reference sheet contains the basics of your event: who, what, when, where, why, and how. (See the example at www.archivists.org/archivesmonth.)

Send your media alert via fax, email, and/or mail to all of your media contacts (and particularly those responsible for community calendar listings) up to three times: four weeks before your event, the week before your event, and the morning before your event.

Tip: Don't send your media alert as an email attachment. Instead, cut and paste the text of the alert into your email message. Many media outlets don't allow their employees to receive email attachments due to the problems of spam and junk email.

Some media outlets have online community calendars that allow you to enter your event information online. Once your listing is reviewed, chances are good that your event will be posted.

3: Write Your Press Release

The press or news release is the basic and most accepted method of conveying information to the media. A news release may announce a special event, meeting, speech, award, appointment, research report, or any other information that you consider noteworthy.

Reporters receive hundreds of news releases each week, so your challenge is to make yours stand out. Ideally you should talk to the reporter first, then follow up with a release.



Send your release to the appropriate editor or news director two to three weeks in advance of the event. (Weekly and monthly publications should be notified one to three months in advance.) Call the news outlet to confirm deadlines. For daily newspapers and electronic media, call one week to 24 hours before the event to confirm receipt of your release. The call serves as a reminder of the event and as a second chance to promote it.

For statewide events, distribute the information to media contacts in as many cities and towns in your state as possible. Wire services and news bureaus (such as Associated Press, Crain's News Service, and Gannett News Service) may be interested in statewide and other large events, but don't rely on these alone.

Local media are most interested in stories with hometown appeal. "Localize" your release as much as possible, citing names of current or historic local people, places, and events. Also, look for a local perspective on a national story. Tying local activities to national events or controversies may give your story more importance in the eyes of both the readers and the media. Be creative with current events. Look for an archives angle on something that is happening in your town or region. One spin-off from the hometown high school team's victory season, for example, could be a profile of a hometown hero from another era.



Despite the advent of online submission of news releases, it's important that you also mail your release and that you apply the following general “rules” to your submission:

- The first paragraph (the “lead”) answers the following questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?
- Limit your lead to 30 words, and make sure it gives the reader a clear idea of the story.
- Present the facts in the order of their news value (inverted pyramid style).
- Identify any people mentioned in the release by title and/or organization. Do not assume that the reader knows anyone's affiliation.
- Stick to the facts. Opinions should be expressed only with attribution (ie, when quoting someone).
- Keep sentences and paragraphs short. Stick to your main topic.
- Use words with which the public is familiar. Avoid jargon. If you must use acronyms, spell out the full proper name with the first mention and indicate the acronym in parentheses.
- Include your contact information (name, email address, telephone number) in the upper right corner of the first page, and in the upper left corner type the release date (the date on which the information may be disclosed). If the information can be published upon receipt, indicate “FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE.”
- Try to limit your release to one page. Double-space your copy and provide wide margins so that the reporter can make notes. If you must go beyond one page, type “More . . .” at the bottom center of the first page and include a brief identifier and page number at the top of page 2.
- At the end of the release, include a sentence or short paragraph that explains what your organization is and does: “Founded in 1936, the Society of American Archivists is North America's oldest and largest national archival professional association. SAA's mission is to serve the education and information needs of more than 5,200 individual and institutional members and to provide leadership to ensure the identification, preservation, and use of records of enduring value.” End the release with “####” or “30” centered at the bottom.
- Print the release on your institution's letterhead.
See www.archivists.org/archivesmonth for a sample.

www.archivists.org

You'll find a sample press release that you can adapt for your use at
www.archivists.org/archivesmonth

4: Take Digital Images

Be sure to ask your media contacts if they would be interested in post-event photos. (Many local newspapers will run photos after an event.) Have a photographer on site during your event to capture any VIP visits or graphic shots. Provide a caption that – very briefly – tells the story of who, what, when, and where.

Here are some tips for making the most of your photographs:

- Ask about the publication's or website's photo requirements. Most prefer high-resolution digital images.
- Compose your picture in a manner that gives the viewer the most information possible. Avoid “mug shots” against a bare wall and drinks in hand. If possible, include a banner, enlarged photo, or “cool” things from your collection as a backdrop to provide context and enhance interest.
- Add depth by shooting at an angle rather than head-on. Candid shots that avoid a posed look are best.
- If using a digital camera: Set the resolution at a minimum of 300 dots per inch (DPI) for photographs that will appear in print, and at a minimum of 72 DPI for online photos.
- Avoid damaging photos with labels and paper clips, and don't write on the back! Type your caption on a separate piece of paper and carefully tape the edge of the photo to the paper. Your caption should identify individuals in the photo and describe any action or location that it portrays.
- Newspapers rarely return photographs, so don't send your only copy!

5: Secure an Official Proclamation

Ask your governor, mayor, or local elected official to declare October as “Archives Month.” Call the official's office first to find out the preferred procedure for such requests. Send a sample proclamation (see the example) with a cover letter indicating the importance of Archives Month within your community/state. If your official does not have a standard proclamation form, suggest that the sample language be typed on the state, city/town, or county letterhead.

Arrange for a photographer and representatives from your repository or organization to be present for the proclamation signing. Send a captioned photo to local media representatives, along with a news release detailing your Archives Month celebration.



www.archivists.org

Go to www.archivists.org/archivesmonth for a proclamation “template” and request letter that may be adapted for your use.