

News Release Checklist

1. Catchy headline
2. First paragraph: Short, snappy, main news information
3. Other paragraphs: More detail on crucial news
4. Opinion in quotation marks from expert, possibly with recommendations
5. Human interest
6. Photographs or graphs
7. Extremely brief description of source of data and methodology
8. Name, phone, and email of contact person
9. Date and "For Immediate Release" (or the release date for embargoed releases)
10. Information about program or organization
11. Sponsorship and funding source
12. Try to keep it under 500 words (250 is better)
13. Include signals for end of page (more) and end of news release (###)

Writing for the Media

The News Release

Purpose. A news release is a brief news story that can be printed or broadcast as is, rewritten by a journalist, or used by a journalist as a starting point to gather more information for a news article or program. A research organization generally distributes a news release to the media when a newsworthy event takes place (“the news peg”).

The news peg could be an external event related to an organization’s area of expertise. For example, when a dead whale washed up on the beach at Waikiki in a few years ago, the University of Hawaii’s Marine Biology Department might have issued a press release with information on whale migratory routes, mortality rates, and probable causes of death. This would have been a good opportunity to get the Department in the news. Alternatively, a research institute might distribute a news release on the occasion of an internal news event, such as the publication of new research findings, an important scientific meeting, or a statement by an important person.

Content. A news release is written like a short newspaper article or radio news item. It should:

- Tell a story that the audience will want to read or hear. Is it about people? Does it affect people? Is it new and dramatic? Is it controversial? Does it involve or quote a well-known person?
- Start with a short, active title that contains the gist of the story.
- Follow the title with a short first paragraph that states the news and why it is significant. This format is called the “inverted pyramid,” which means that the most important information comes first. Details and less important information follow.
- Alternatively, the first paragraph can “hook” the readers in—Posing the problem? Highlighting an individual?—and the second paragraph can state the news and its significance.
- Include all the important facts. Who? What? When? Where? and Why?
- Double-check facts, names, degrees, and dates to ensure that the release is accurate. Be sure to spell out all acronyms.
- Be clear and concise (the KISS rule). A news release should be only one or two pages long, double spaced (maximum 500 words).
- Stick with the facts. Don’t editorialize.
- Don't use too many numbers. Many journalists hate math.
- Add interest with a direct quotation from a well-known or prestigious person.
- Note that a contact person is available for an interview and give full (home and office) contact information.
- End the release with a standard short description of your program.

The Media Advisory

Purpose. A media advisory is a brief announcement alerting radio, television, and newspaper journalists when you or one of your staff members are available to comment on an area currently in the news. Often a media advisory is issued to invite journalists to an event such as a press conference, scientific meeting, or special lecture.

Content. In general, follow the same format as a press release:

- Begin with a short first paragraph that states your news and why it is significant. Alternatively, the first paragraph can “hook” the readers in—Posing the problem? Highlighting an individual?—and the second paragraph can state the news and its significance. This will take the form of a biographical sketch of the person available for interview, establishing his/her area of expertise, or a description of the topic to be covered at an event.
- Give full (home and office) information on how the “interviewee” and/or your organization’s media liaison officer can be contacted. For an event, give the exact date, time, and place.
- Again, keep it short and simple: one or two pages long, double spaced (maximum 500 words).
- Attach useful background material such as a biographical sketch of the interviewee, a relevant publication, or the program of a meeting. If your release is distributed by email, you can link to the background material on your website.
- Have the text of a lecture or a written summary of points made at a press conference available for distribution to journalists at the event.

The Opinion Piece—Op-Ed or Letter to the Editor

Purpose. If you feel strongly about an issue in the news and/or have information that the journalists appear to have overlooked, you may wish to send out an opinion or commentary piece, which could be published as an “op-ed” or letter to the editor. These are printed opposite the editorial page, hence their name. An opinion piece has a better chance of being published if it is signed by a senior, well-known person—perhaps your institute director.

Content. The Communications Consortium Media Center has compiled these 10 tips for successful op-eds and letters to the editor:

1. Try to reduce your point to a single sentence. For example: "Every child deserves a family," "The United Nations needs more funding," or "Women have achieved enormous strides in the past decade."
2. See if your sentence passes the "wow" test or the "hmmm" test; if not, the point needs sharpening.
3. Any point worth making will have to be defended. Muster your best three or four supporting arguments and state each one in a single paragraph. Be as specific as possible. Avoid starting sentences with "There are." Use the active rather than the passive voice.
4. Raise your opponents' best arguments and challenge them with countervailing facts, withering irony, condescension, or whatever is appropriate, but deal with them.

5. Ask yourself: What is the minimum background information a reader absolutely has to have in order to grasp this point? Write two paragraphs that summarize this information.
6. Imagine your target reader browsing through the newspaper on a workday morning, rushing to find something interesting. What kind of statement might catch this person's attention? If you can raise questions, surprise, intrigue, or baffle your reader into reading beyond the first paragraph, you stand a chance that the editor will let you put the entire op-ed in the paper.
7. Now, write the piece. Draft about 1,000 words (four double-spaced pages) maximum. Restate your key points in the final paragraph.
8. Cut out half a page. Eliminate repetition. Trim words, not ideas. Check every word and see what you can eliminate. Convert passive-voice sentences to active ones. Give the piece to someone else and ask him/her to review it. If rewriting or cutting is required, you want to do it yourself, rather than leave it to the discretion of the newspaper editor.
9. Your piece should be about 750 words. Don't forget to include your name, title, and affiliation at the end.
10. Submit the piece with a short cover letter that includes your name and phone number. You will be notified if your op-ed is considered for publication. Calling and badgering the staff of the op-ed page may not help and could hurt you. Be patient, it can take weeks for a piece to appear, even for an op-ed with a time-sensitive point. Stay ready to update and revise in the hours before publication.

The Press Kit: What Goes Out with your News Release

News releases on technical subjects are more likely to be used if you provide journalists with supplementary materials, such as:

- Illustrations—photographs, computer graphics, charts, or drawings—that describe and clarify the subject.
- The actual research papers or reports on which the story is based.
- Background information on the work being reported, such as other articles in the field, reference material, and/or a bibliography to which the journalist may refer.
- Biographies and recent photographs of the principal researcher(s) in the story.
- Information on your organization—brochure, folder, other.

Email Tips

- **Spam filtering.** Your message will never get published if it's filtered out and your intended recipients never see it. Work with your major media contacts to make sure that you are included in the recognized senders that are allowed past their organizations' spam filters.
- **Your subject line is crucial.** It's like the headline on a print release, but even shorter. Your subject line needs to grab attention, or your message will likely be deleted without being read.
- **Message format.** Your choices are plain text or rich text/HTML. Be aware that how your release appears will depend on the setting of your recipient's email reader. So, while a release may be nicely formatted with bold, italics, embedded hyperlinks, centering etc. in

your message using rich text or HTML, if your recipient uses plain text only, it won't look the same and may be hard to read. On the other hand, if you use plain text, it's harder to draw visual attention to key information. It may be worth polling your major media contacts to see what they use.

- **Plain text hint.** Try using all caps instead of boldface for headings, etc. But NEVER use all caps in your message subject line.
- **Attachments.** You can use attachments to send support information from your press kit—detailed articles, graphs, photographs, etc.—BUT BE AWARE OF SIZE LIMITS. Many organizations block emails with large attachments. To keep messages small, use links to your website instead of attachments whenever possible (for example, send your media contacts a pdf document that is available for download from your website rather than as an attachment to your email message).

More on Visuals

If you have photographs, charts, illustrations, or diagrams, include them with your news releases, even if they are not exactly right for media. They will make a good starting point for artists at the newspapers, magazines, or television stations. Surprisingly, radio reporters often like to receive visual material. The pictures help them understand the story better, and they may include some description of an important visual in their broadcast. Good photographs or graphics are often the real reason why a newspaper, magazine, or television station uses a story.

- Photographs of people doing things are the most effective, rather than photographs of things (a new building) or of people standing in a line (conference participants). Limit the number of people in a picture to one, two, or three. Identify the subjects when the picture is taken. It is surprising how difficult it is to get the names right even a day or two later.

Tips on Digital Photo Files:

- Be aware that print publications require HIGH RESOLUTION PHOTOS. This equates to larger file size, so the size limits on email attachments mentioned above quickly become a factor if you're trying to email photographs with your release.
- Familiarize yourself with the terminology of digital photo resolution, and find out what the requirements of your media contacts are.
- **Key term:** DPI (dots per inch), which measures the resolution of a photograph at a GIVEN SIZE. (The same photograph file will have a higher resolution if it is sized smaller, a lower resolution if sized larger.) So, for example, a publication may request photographs that are a minimum of 220 dpi at 5x7 inches in size. Sometimes this is expressed in terms of the total pixels in the width and height—for example, 1100x1540 pixels (220 dots times 5 inches width = 1100 pixels, and 220 dots times 7 inches height = 1540).
- In general, newsprint publications need a minimum of 220 dpi at the size they wish to publish, while glossy publications such as magazines require 300 dpi.
- Or, as a very rough rule of thumb, photo files for newsprint should be at least 1 megabyte (MB) in size, while a large photograph in a glossy magazine would need to be 5 MB or more.

- **File types:** Most publications are fine receiving photographs as JPG files, although some may require TIFFs, which have a bigger file size. Avoid any others, including GIFs and bitmaps.
- Since high-resolution photographs can get too big to email as attachments, look into ways of providing them separately for download, including:
 - Establishing an “FTP” site on your organization’s web server or a “drop” on a free online service such as Drop.io, where media can log on and download high-resolution photographs. Then you simply add a photo note to your release with a link to the download site.
 - Alternatively, you can post high-resolution photographs on a photo-sharing website such as Flickr, from which they can be downloaded, and provide a link in your news release.
- Either in your release itself (if the photos are sent as attachments) or in the info fields for photos posted online, make sure to provide full caption and photo credit information for each shot.

Sending Out Your Release

The key to successful media coverage is good personal relationships with individual journalists and their editors. The best news release in the world is useless unless it reaches the right journalist at the right time and gets picked up in the media:

- Don't just mail out a news release. Chances are it will end up in the trash. And don't just telephone a journalist and try to convey all your information on the phone. Chances are he or she is working under a deadline and can't really listen to you. Rather, telephone the journalist, ask if he/she is interested in your story, and then fax, email, or hand deliver your release (ask which is preferred).
- Your findings may be more appropriate for a “feature,” which is more like a magazine article, rather than a breaking news story. Offer a good feature idea to one particular journalist only on an “exclusive” basis. A feature may start with a news release, or you may phone a journalist you know and pitch a story idea. A feature needs more material, including interviews, than a simple news story. You will work with the journalist closely throughout the process.
- If you have an opinion piece, contact the editor responsible for the op-ed page, or the op-ed section of a news show, by telephone. Give a very brief description of what you have to say, ask if the editor is interested, and—if you get a positive response—send your piece, normally by fax, email, or hand delivery. If you have a good relationship with the editor and can convince him/her of the importance of your commentary, he or she may use your material in an editorial rather than publishing it as an op-ed. Remember, you send an op-ed piece or a letter to the editor to one outlet only. If they don't want to publish it, you can try someone else.
- Find out the best time to telephone journalists—not when they have a deadline or are just getting ready to go on the air. Be prepared for them to be very rude if you telephone them at a bad time. Ask them when would be a better time and telephone later.
- Target your distribution for each release to individual journalists according to their particular interests, for example a story on child health to a journalist who likes to write about children.

You can find out their interests by chatting with them and by reading their articles or watching/listening to them on the air. Journalists will be more likely to use your releases if they only receive material that really interests them. Your media list should be categorized to make sure that your reach just the right journalists and don't burden others with material they are unlikely to use.

- Journalists tend to change jobs more often than many other professionals. Keep your media list up-to-date by following which releases result in coverage, keeping in personal contact with key journalists, and surveying your list periodically via return postcards. Your “little black book” of journalists’ names, interests, and up-to-date contact information is worth its weight in gold.
- When you establish contact with journalists, offer to provide them with a list of your staff including their areas of expertise and full contact information. Your goal is to get yourself and your colleagues into the journalists’ “little black book.”
- A news release that is related to a specific event should reach journalists before the event takes place. Mail or fax your release well in advance or, better yet, have it delivered personally.
- If you miss the event (“news peg”), don't send a release at all except possibly to magazines or other less-frequent publications that may still be interested.

After Your Release Goes Out

- If your news release or opinion piece is rejected, do not despair. You may want to make revisions and submit an opinion piece to another publication. Or try sending out another news release in a few weeks or months on another topic. Your piece may have arrived during a very busy week with lots of competition. Often it is just a matter of your news release or opinion piece being in the right place at the right time.
- If your piece is printed, make copies and send them to colleagues, elected officials, funders, reporters, and others key individuals whom you wish to reach. This is an excellent way to get your message to your target audience.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**NEWS RELEASE FORMAT –
meant for publication**

In Hawai‘i and the Pacific Islands, Climate Change Means Billions of Dollars of Coastal Damage, Widespread Coral Death and Human Health Risks, Official US Assessment Finds

HONOLULU (November 23, 2018) – Strained freshwater supplies, damaged and compromised coastal infrastructure, coral reef death, and greater stresses on native biodiversity and species are among the major concerns and challenges detailed in the Hawai‘i-Pacific Islands chapter of the fourth official US National Climate Assessment, released today. In economic terms, the impacts add up to billions of dollars.

The [chapter on Hawai‘i and the US-Affiliated Pacific Islands](#) appears in [Volume II of the Fourth National Climate Assessment](#), the most significant US report to assess the effects of climate change on the US economy and communities. The assessment finds that early action to address these impacts can lower economic, environmental, social, and cultural costs and could help to prevent conflict or displacement from lands and resources.

“This report makes it clear that climate change has arrived far sooner and as a greater threat than we previously thought,” said Dr. Victoria Keener of the East-West Center, the chapter’s regional lead. “Here on O‘ahu, we already see road closures during morning rush hour because of flooding, and with sea level rise we’ll see this more and more. Our Pacific Island neighbors on atolls will face sustainability challenges sooner rather than later. The world’s largest insurers recently stated that climate change is creating an ‘uninsurable’ world. Only by acting now can we hope to effectively manage these risks.”

The chapter lays out the changes already being felt in Hawai‘i and Pacific Islands, as well as what lies ahead. The top findings include:

- **Dependable and safe water supplies are threatened** by rising temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, sea level rise, and increased risk of extreme drought and flooding. Islands are already experiencing saltwater contamination due to sea level rise, which is expected to catastrophically impact food and water security, especially on low-lying atolls.
- **Sea level rise has accelerated and is now damaging critical infrastructure** such as transportation and housing, as well as beaches, ecosystems and cultural sites. In Hawai‘i, the value of all structures and land expected to be flooded by 2100 amounts to more than \$19 billion statewide. The Pacific Islands will experience sea level rise higher than the global average, projected to further accelerate strongly after mid-century. Adaptation strategies that are implemented sooner can better prepare communities and infrastructure.

- **Increasing ocean temperatures and acidification threaten fisheries, coral reefs, and the livelihoods they support.** Widespread coral reef bleaching and death are occurring more frequently, and by mid-century these events are projected to occur annually, especially if current trends in greenhouse gas emissions continue. Bleaching and acidification will result in loss of reefs, leading to lower fisheries yields and loss of coastal protection and habitat.
- **These changes imperil Indigenous peoples' health and well-being** and their relationships with lands, territories, and cultural resources.
- **Climate change reduces the ability of habitats to support protected plant and animal species.** Changes promote the spread of invasive species, threatening biodiversity, important to island people and a source of economic revenue. Some species are expected to become extinct and others to decline to the point of requiring costly protection.

“This Assessment puts out a red alert to island communities like O‘ahu and shows just how vulnerable we are at a local level to climate change,” said Josh Stanbro, Chief Resilience Officer for the City and County of Honolulu. “We thank the local scientists and field experts who worked overtime to generate data that will directly inform our upcoming O‘ahu Resilience Strategy. Given the hurricane threats and flooding we’ve already seen, everyone’s new year resolution should be to get off of fossil fuel as fast as we possibly can—it’s the only way to protect our safety and long-term security.”

About the Fourth National Climate Assessment

Mandated in the Global Change Research Act passed by Congress in 1990, the National Climate Assessment synthesizes the state of climate knowledge and assesses climate change impacts, risks, and adaptation across the United States every four years. The main objective is to help Americans better identify, avoid, and/or reduce climate-related risks. The National Climate Assessment process relies on consensus and undergoes extensive review.

Volume II of the Fourth National Climate Assessment builds upon the physical science assessment presented in Volume I, the Climate Science Special Report, released in November 2017. Vol. II places a strong emphasis on regional information, addressing the impacts of climate change on 10 regions of the United States. It also evaluates the risks from climate changes across 15 national-level topics, often using case studies to provide additional context and showcase community success stories.

The report was written by more than 300 Federal and non-Federal authors representing a range of expertise, a number of whom were selected through a public call for nominations. The Hawai‘i and Pacific Islands chapter has 11 authors and 77 regional contributors, and is backed by more than 250 citations from published articles, reports, and books.

The full National Climate Assessment report can be viewed online at nca2018.globalchange.gov and Chapter 27: Hawai‘i and US-Affiliated Pacific Islands at nca2018.globalchange.gov/chapter/hawaii-pacific.

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Special thanks to the 77 technical contributors to the Hawai'i and Pacific Islands chapter of the Fourth National Climate Assessment and to the Pacific Islands Climate Adaptation Science Center (PI-CASC) and the Pacific Regional Integrated Sciences and Assessments (RISA) for their financial support for the chapter development process.

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The [EAST-WEST CENTER](#) promotes better relations and understanding among the people and nations of the United States, Asia, and the Pacific through cooperative study, research, and dialogue. Established by the U.S. Congress in 1960, the Center serves as a resource for information and analysis on critical issues of common concern, bringing people together to exchange views, build expertise, and develop policy options.

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MEDIA ADVISORY FORMAT
– meant for media attendance

Media Advisory

Dec. 3, 2018

Fiji Press Invited to Dec. 8 Gala Luncheon and Panel Celebrating 25 Years of the U.S. South Pacific Scholarship

Event at the Outrigger Resort in Sigatoka will feature a U.S. Embassy speaker on Pacific Islands engagement, USSP alumni sharing their education experiences, and an executive panel on American business in the Pacific Islands

WHAT: Members of the news media are invited to cover a gala luncheon and executive discussion panel celebrating 25 years of the United States government's U.S. South Pacific Scholarship (USSP). The event is part of a three-day conference of USSP alumni co-sponsored by the East-West Center, U.S. Embassy-Suva, Matson South Pacific, Outrigger Hotels and Resorts, Dr. Bronner's, and SerendiCoco.

WHEN: Saturday, 8 December. Luncheon program begins at 11:30 a.m. Discussion panel with American businesses from 12:45 – 2 p.m.

WHERE: Outrigger Fiji Beach Resort, Sigatoka, Vale ni Kana Restaurant

WHO: Speakers include:

- **Rebecca Archer-Knepper**, Acting Deputy Chief of Mission, U.S. Embassy-Suva
- East-West Center President **Richard R. Vuylsteke**
- **Joel Nilon**, Pacific Regionalism Adviser, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
- USSP alumni **Mitieli Cama** (*Fiji*), **Ludwig Aba** (*PNG*) and **Kinaai Kairo** (Kiribati)
- **Michael Jones**, Strategic Development Manager, Matson South Pacific
- **Laura Essenberg**, Social Media Strategist, Outrigger Hotels and Resorts

Etuale Sefo, Managing Director, SerendiCoco Samoa/Dr. Bronner's.

BACKGROUND: The U.S. South Pacific Scholarship Program (USSP), authorized by the U.S. Congress and funded by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, is a merit-based scholarship program that provides opportunities for degree study at the University of Hawai'i in fields that are directly relevant to the development needs of Pacific Island. The program is administered by the East-West Center in Honolulu. More at:

EastWestCenter.org/USSP.

INDIVIDUAL PITCH SAMPLE

[INSERT GREETING HERE]

Hoping to interest you in a feature (or at least a featured event) later this month on a new documentary film about the unbroken voyaging traditions of ethnic Polynesians from a tiny, isolated island group in the Solomon Islands (generally considered part of Melanesia and outside the classic ‘Polynesian triangle’). The 2-part film, [We the Navigators](#), will be screened [Jan. 26 at the Palace Theatre in Hilo](#) and [Jan. 31 at Bishop Museum](#) (East-West Center is co-sponsoring the Bishop screening). They use only traditional materials and methods to build their canoes, which are of strikingly different design than we are accustomed to in Hawai‘i, and their wayfinding practices include mystical elements that are not often discussed in the modern voyaging renaissance.

The primary source on this is Dr. Marianne “Mimi” George, an anthropologist specializing in voyaging cultures and an accomplished sailor who is the driving force behind the film and has been working for decades to help the islanders try to preserve their voyaging culture. (She was also the partner of the late David Lewis, who wrote the seminal 1972 book *We the Navigators* that helped spark the voyaging renaissance and was a crewmember on *Hokule‘a*’s maiden voyage to Tahiti in 1976. A lot of his book was based on his experiences with the late chief Kaloso Kaveia, then the senior Polynesian navigator in the Solomons.)

Here’s more info. Let me know if you’d like me to put you in touch with Mimi. There are lots of great images, including a couple attached here.

We the Voyagers is a two-part [documentary film](#) featuring the ethnically [Polynesian voyagers of Taumako, Solomon Islands](#), who share their history, motivations, and skills through storytelling, canoe building, and wayfinding. They use only the traditional designs, materials, and methods of their cultural hero Lata, who according to legend built the first voyaging canoe (vaka) and navigated to distant islands.

Part 1. *We, the Voyagers: Our Vaka*

We, the Polynesian voyagers of Taumako, Solomon Islands, share our history, motivations, and skills through storytelling, canoe building, and wayfinding. We recall our ancestors, who made the greatest of human migrations. We use only the designs, materials, and methods of our culture-hero Lata, who built the first voyaging canoe (vaka) and navigated to distant islands. When Europeans took over, we became isolated. To regain sustainability, our most experienced navigator, Te Alike Kaveia, led us in planting gardens, feeding workers, making rope from plants, weaving and sewing sails, protecting our trees, adzing parts for



voyaging canoes, and lashing them together. Kaveia enlisted an anthropologist to help us make this film. After he died in 2009, we built a vaka. Te Aliko Holani, our new Lata, prepared us for an open-ocean voyage. From the living story of Lata we learn that everyone is welcome in Lata's crew, and that we can avoid making key mistakes as we strive to connect with long-lost family and new friends on faraway shores.

Part 2. *We, the Voyagers: Our Moana*

In our isolated Polynesian community, we live the story of our ancestral culture-hero Lata. To make a voyage, Lata welcomes men, women, and children as crew, including both hard workers with skills and applicants of dubious character. Our community blesses the vessel and sailors, and we learn how to sail in Lata's arms. We find our way in the open ocean by interacting with patterns of winds, waves, stars, and other signs that our ancestors show us when we need them. We arrive at islands and learn what happened to family members since the last voyage some generations earlier. We reconcile, reaffirm our love for each other, and look to our future together.

About Dr. Marianne "Mimi" George

Dr. Mimi George is an anthropologist, sailor, and writer who specializes in voyaging cultures. Before her involvement in the [Vaka Taumako Project](#), she documented voyaging traditions of islanders in New Ireland, Papua New Guinea, and Siberian Yupik Eskimos on the Alaskan and Russian sides of the Bering Strait. Her research voyages have used ancient polar technology, and the early nineteenth-century European technique of wintering-over in a sailboat frozen in the sea ice of Antarctica. In the Vaka Taumako Project, she studies and works with ethnically Polynesian Solomon Islanders who are building vessels and making voyages using ancient technology, materials, tools, and navigation methods. Mimi has made some 25 inter-island voyages in the Solomons' Santa Cruz Islands, and one voyage from there through Vanuatu, either under the sailing direction of the late master navigator Te Aliko Kaveia or with him on board.

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