QUICK ITEMS TO CHECK WHEN PREPARING AND DISTRIBUTING A STANDARD NEWS RELEASE

E-MAIL DISTRIBUTION NOTES:

1. Even if you save your release on nice letterhead and ship it as a PDF or MSWord file, copy and paste the information into the body of the e-mail message without any fancy logos or images. Some news organizations don't have time to open files, and some have older systems, or older versions of the PDF formatting or MSWord. Strange but true. A news release sent this way might be a bit less sexy, but it will get read faster than one with nothing in the body of the message and a link to a downloadable file.

2. Try not to send massive files. Older systems and too much time to download can help you lose a good story idea. Small images with an offer to provide print quality ones, etc, are often a better way to go. This is where a good website can help, but shouldn't be relied on a sole source of supporting information.

3. Don't place a huge number of people in the "BCC" or the "CC" lines of your outbox. Some e-mail systems detect them as 'spam,' and either block them or move them straight to a trash bin. Better to set up a specific mailing address list from your mail system, or a subscriber-based list-serve if you are on a large system like the one at the U of L.

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NEWS RELEASE PREPARATION TIPS

LETTERHEAD

Should clearly identify your organization, and list your complete address, postal code, telephone, fax, e-mail and website. The information should say "Media Release" somewhere in larger than average type (up to 24 points). Either as a pre-printed part of the letterhead, or as the first line under the organizations' address information.

HEADLINE

Should indicate some type of action, highlight most newsworthy element of media release topic. If you are sending electronically, the headline should be placed in the subject line of the e-mail, as well as be repeated in the body copy

DATES -- Very important!

If an item is for release without any type of deferral, then you put the release date on it as follows:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE -- XXX DATE, 2012

This relates to information that is not time sensitive. The assumption is that, once sent, media outlets can use it at any time. There are no limits placed on its release for any reason by the sender.

If an item needs to be released to media but can't be public yet, then you need to approach it this way:

EMBARGO -- DO NOT RELEASE UNTIL XXX TIME, XXX DATE, 2012

This relates to information that is event or issue sensitive, such as a policy statement from an organization, or a public announcement that will be made at a certain time for a wider audience. Information should be provided to media representatives in order for them to prepare their stories, but they should know the rationale behind holding the information from wider distribution until a specific time or date.

COPY, STYLE, LENGTH

COPY -- The safest method for producing a standard news release is to follow the "inverted pyramid" style of writing: List the most important facts in the first paragraph, and wind up with information you decide is "least important." The first paragraph must cover the following elements, in an order pertinent to the subject of your release, and in a style that will encourage further reading.

WHO / WHAT / WHERE / WHEN / WHY / HOW

The second paragraph and subsequent information supports the lead paragraph in more detail. Often that takes the form of a quote from a spokesperson or more information about the topic of the release which rounds out the "5 W's & H".

STYLE -- Write "actively" whenever possible. Edit ruthlessly. If you don't do it, a newspaper editor will. You have about 15 seconds of their attention, and you must use it wisely.

Introduce a spokesperson and attribute quotes in the following manner:

XXX spokesperson said the event is the largest to date... or: XXX spokesperson, Executive Director of Product Development, said the event will be the largest to date. "Our volunteers have worked very hard and we want this show to be a record-setter," XXX spokesperson said. This is a fairly safe style.

If the release covers an event that has a number of different elements, a point-form list may suffice to add some additional information without cluttering up the release; use this sparingly, as "laundry lists" with no context run a high risk of getting ignored.

LENGTH -- Whenever possible, limit the release to one page. The longer it is, the less chance it has.

If you have a significant amount of information, place the important details on the front page, and indicate attachments on subsequent pages: Performer biographies, product information, or other relevant (but not necessarily immediate) facts relating to your release.

If you have a web site, include the address, but do not expect it to be the main source of information. Do not send a reporter to the web site unless they have absolutely ALL the info they might need for the story there, or there is an element of the story that you can't get to them conveniently (such as a photo or a fact sheet about the company)

Often, a news release is the "front end" of a press kit, which may also contain photos, additional news clippings, biographies, and other relevant information.

WRAP-UP -- End the news release with a "-- 30 –" footer, centred in the middle of the page. This is a leftover from the days of hand-set type, where a typesetter would see -- 30 -- as the end of the story.

If your release runs to two pages, place a "-- more –" footer at the bottom of the page.
On the top of the second page, place information on the top of the page as follows:

PAGE 2 -- XXX RELEASE -- XXX DATE, 2012. Leave a reasonable space, then continue with the balance of your release. This done so that if the first page is misplaced, the reporter knows that there is more information and can takes steps to find it.

AT THE END OF THE RELEASE, YOU ABSOLUTELY MUST LIST THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION:

Contact: XXX Communications Officer (403) 555-1212 / cell (403) 555-1234
XXX spokesperson (403) 555-1213 / cell (403) 555-1234
Web address: www.zzz.com / e-mail address person@organization.ca
Social Media: Facebook / Twitter/ LinkedIn

This tells the media person who to call for a comment, and who to call if they can't find the spokesperson.