

Media Toolkit

HOW TO WRITE AND USE AN EFFECTIVE BACKGROUNDER IN PUBLIC RELATIONS



In order to write an effective backgrounder for a press kit (or for other uses), you must first understand what a backgrounder is.

What is a backgrounder?

A backgrounder is an in-depth information piece providing, as the name implies, background information on a specific issue. They often accompany press releases and provide additional information not found in the releases.

How do you write a backgrounder?

To write a backgrounder, you need to follow some basic guidelines:

- Start with a concise statement on the issue or subject about the topic of accompanying press release. For example: “Clinical social workers provide the majority of the nation’s mental health services.”
- Follow the opening statement with a historical overview of the issue. Trace the issue’s evolution—how it came to be—and the major events leading up to it. You can utilize outside information in this section. However, cite your statements within the text, according to the appropriate style guidelines of the publication you are sending it to.
- Explain why this issue is important TODAY. State its significance and back that statement up, as appropriate.
- Present the implications of the issue. Back up that statement with facts.
- Use subheads where appropriate to make for easier reading. A backgrounder should average four to five pages in length; however, it is always a good idea to let the information, not the page –count, dictate the length of your piece.

Why would you use a backgrounder?

The object of the backgrounder is to answer any anticipated questions about a particular subject. The more information you can provide up front, the less scrambling you have to do when the media calls.

For help preparing a backgrounder, use Social Work Speaks, the Encyclopedia of Social Work, or contact the NASW Communications Department at media@naswdc.org