

Working with your Public Information Office

You may have newsworthy research or work that you wish to share with the world, but are unsure of where to start. This is when a Public Information Office can help!

What is a Public Information Office?

The primary role of a Public Information Office is to facilitate interactions between researchers and journalists. Public Information Officers (PIO's) can help to arrange interviews, write and distribute press releases, and organize and host press conferences to share newsworthy research with the public. PIO's also handle incoming requests from journalists, including finding scientific experts who can comment on science-related news stories or who can offer expertise on a specific subject or controversial issue.

Public Information Offices will work with you to determine whether your research is newsworthy and, if so, the best way to share it with the media and/or the general public. Public Information Offices can also provide training and resources to help you learn how to best interact with members of the media or other general audiences.

PIO's are not news media. They are a part of your team of resources and work to disseminate accurate, informative stories about science. PIO's cannot and do not tell journalists what they should or should not write about or broadcast.

Where can I find a Public Information Office to help me?

Whether you realize it or not, your institution probably has Public Information Office, also known as a News Office, Media Relations Office, Communications Office or similar, that is ready to help you. Scientific societies in which you are a member and funding agencies that sponsor your research also often have press offices that can help publicize your work. And of course, there's always the AGU Public Information Office at your disposal.

At AGU, Public Information Officers (PIO's) are always eager to hear about your research due to be published in an AGU journal or presented at an AGU meeting. AGU PIO's will also often partner with PIO's at your home institution to promote your work from both offices.

Examples of Public Information Offices:

[U.S. Geological Survey \(USGS\) Newsroom](#)

[National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration \(NOAA\) Communications & External Affairs](#)

[NCAR & UCAR Media Office](#)

How do Public Information Offices find out about news? (Is it my job to contact my office?)

At AGU and other scientific societies, journal editors or committees try to screen journal submissions for interesting topics or research results of importance to the public. They will then pass these on to a Public Information Office. When a PIO is alerted to newsworthy research this way, he or she will then reach out to the paper's author(s) to talk about the potential for publicizing their research.

Interesting research, however, can and does go unnoticed for a variety of reasons. AGU, for example, publishes tens of thousands of pages of peer-reviewed research each year. It's impossible for a PIO to screen each page for exciting discoveries. If you have interesting research, then it's incumbent on you to contact a PIO. **Be proactive!**

What do I need to do before I contact my Public Information Office?

First, evaluate your research to determine whether it is truly newsworthy. Before contacting your Public Information Office, determine the relevance of your results to journalists by considering whether they are of interest to the general public (media consumers). Ask yourself these questions:

Is it newsworthy?

1. Does this research significantly contribute to the understanding of a controversial issue?
2. Does it impact the health or safety of the public or the environment?
3. Does it improve (or potentially improve) quality of life?
4. Does it decrease the cost or enhance the capabilities of current technology?
5. Does it set a record?
6. Does it explain an aspect of science that often captivates public interest (e.g. natural hazards, natural resources, etc.)?

If the answer to any of these questions is "Yes," then consider reaching out to your PIO. Even if your answer was "Maybe," it's still worth making a phone call or shooting an e-mail. Your Public Information Office can help you determine for sure whether your research is newsworthy. If the answer to each question is "No," then it's worth talking to a colleague to make sure that you've considered all the newsworthiness potential before passing on the opportunity.

Note: **Timeliness counts!** Journalists are hesitant to report on results that are greater than a few months old. If your research is newsworthy, contact your Public Information Office immediately. It will take time for PIO's to help prepare the message about your news and to arrange interviews. If a reporter contacts you, remember that reporter's deadlines are often measured in minutes or hours, not days or weeks. Return any calls from your Public Information Office or from members of the news media as soon as possible.

I want to be a science expert for the media!

Sometimes, journalists will reach out to a Public Information Office to find an expert who can talk about world events related to science (e.g. extreme weather, earthquakes, astronomical events, etc.) or who can provide an expert opinion on another scientific study. If you are interested in volunteering as an expert in your field, call or e-mail your Public Information Office and let them know you are interested.

AGU has a network of experts who are on call for media interviews and to do other scientific outreach. If you are interested in participating, learn more by e-mailing news@agu.org.