

How do I
publicise my oral
history project?

This sheet will
explain:

- Why you should publicise your project.
 - A variety of publicity techniques.
 - How to write a press release.
 - Other ways to get coverage in magazines, journals and newsletters.
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Why publicise it?

There are several reasons why you might want publicity for your community project or your individual research:

- to appeal for interviewees, other contacts, or volunteers
- to track down photographs or other sources of information
- to let people know how you are progressing
- to publicise related events or publications
- to acknowledge sponsorship or grants

How do I publicise it?

Make sure you have a clear focus, and don't try to cover too much at a time. Decide what it is you want to achieve, and the most appropriate approach. It's well worth giving some thought to the different groups or 'audiences' that you want to reach with your publicity. For instance, is it elderly people, people who live in your locality now, or people who may have lived there in the past? Perhaps you are appealing for memories of particular types of work, or other specific subjects? This will help you to identify the most useful outlets for your publicity. Once you've done this, you can try some of the following suggestions:

Send out a press release

Anyone can do this, but you can improve your chances of getting it noticed by keeping the following in mind:

- put 'Press Release' prominently at the very beginning, with the date, and follow this with a 'headline' that makes people want to read on.
- indicate if it is for 'Immediate Release' or for release on a specific date.
- keep it short and simple – preferably one side of A4. Avoid jargon, and fancy fonts or typefaces, and use 1.5 or double spacing.
- put the most important information at the beginning.
- include contact details. Will someone will be available for interview or a photo opportunity? Can you provide photographs?
- send it to local radio and TV stations as well as daily, weekly and free newspapers – get details from your library. In Leicestershire, these include Asian radio and television networks and editions of the Leicester Mercury. Some hospitals also have their own radio stations.
- the offer of an interview – particularly on 'live' radio or TV - can be quite daunting. Reporters and presenters will try to put you at ease – but do think beforehand about what you want to say, and remember that there is really no such thing as 'off the record'.

More publicity techniques:

Make the most of magazines, journals and newsletters



You don't have to pay for expensive advertisements to get publicity. Local and national publications (such as *History Today*, the *BBC History Magazine* or *Local History Magazine*) often have free 'What's On' listings, or 'News' columns where you can appeal for contacts, report on your progress, or promote publications.

Locally, you can target community or parish newsletters, those of historical organisations (including EMOHA itself), or other relevant organisations. For instance, trade unions and large local companies often have groups for retired members, and may publish regular newsletters for them.

You can also submit articles based on your research or your project to local or national publications, which can be identified through your local library or the internet. Check copy deadlines, word limits and contact details well in advance. Most editors will expect copy to be emailed to them or sent on a floppy disc.

How do I know if it's working?

It's worth taking some time to evaluate how effective your publicity is. For example, keep a file of newspaper cuttings or articles, and a record of any TV or radio coverage. If you don't get any response from your press releases or letters, then you may need to rethink your approach. You can also record the number of visitors to your meetings or events, and see if these increase over time – and if people volunteer to help with the project, ask them how they found out about it.

Write a letter

Writing to local newspapers is often a very effective way of appealing for interviewees, photographs or other information. If you allow enough time, you may get more coverage in a specialist column such as 'Mr Leicester' in the *Leicester Mercury* than a letter to the editor. If possible, include a copy of a photograph, or an extract from your research so far. Do remember that space is always limited, so your letter may be edited – or it may not appear at all. You may want to write to newspapers in other parts of the country as well: in areas from which people were evacuated to Leicestershire during World War II, for instance, if you were researching this particular subject.

Other ways of getting yourself noticed

You might want to produce some **leaflets, posters, or a newsletter** of your own. These can be done quite cheaply using a desktop publishing programme on a computer, but take care with the layout, make sure the text is easy to read, and use good quality paper. Make sure you follow guidelines about acknowledging sponsorship or grants – you may need to include logos or use a specific form of words. Think carefully about who you want to reach, and target them accordingly – door to door distribution, maybe, or through your local library, school or other community facility.

Interesting and eye-catching **display materials** can also attract attention to your project, give it a presence at events which you can't attend in person, or promote it in local facilities such as schools, doctors' surgeries, community centres, libraries, pubs or village halls. Use large type and large photographs (10" x 8" or bigger), and avoid too much text. Make sure it gives clear information about what you are doing, how other people can get involved, and where to contact you.

Use the Internet

You can increase your potential audience considerably if you have access to the internet. You can often get free publicity by:

- emailing relevant sites with information. See the 'News' and 'Diary' sections of EMOHA's website at www.le.ac.uk/emoha for an example.
- building your own website. With some training, and access to the right equipment and software this is not quite as daunting as it might sound.
- building links from your site to others of a similar nature, and asking them to return the favour.

