

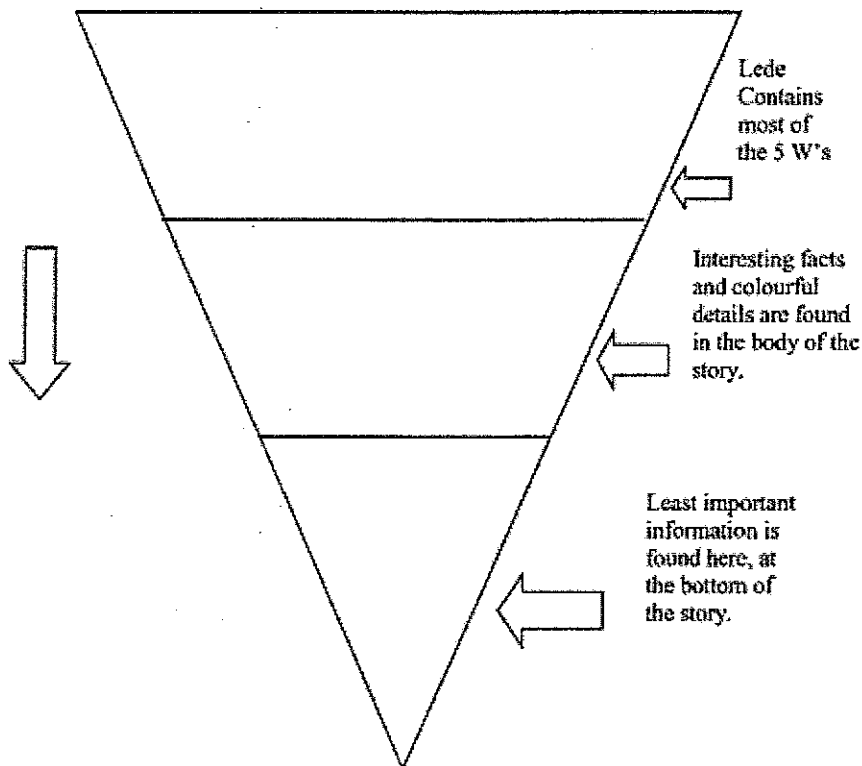
## Writing the News Release and other Writing Tips

2010 NC City/County Clerks School  
Research Triangle Park, NC

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## PRACTICAL WRITING TIPS

1. Fight the blank page by starting with simple sentences to list each point.
2. Answer yes/no questions with "yes" or "no," then explain.
3. Avoid "depends."
4. Use first person active voice.
5. Include key messages as well as facts
6. Only say what you know: Never: "I think," "we believe," "I'm not sure, but..." "maybe"
7. Proof from the bottom up and with another set of eyes.
8. Words matter, so make every one count.
9. Organize and present the points using the inverted pyramid:



# THE NEWS RELEASE

## TITLE

1. The title should be a call to action; it should include a verb.
2. Think of the title as summarizing the news in a fragment or phrase.
3. This is the first of three chances you'll have to catch the editor's attention.
4. Imagine your title as the headline of the story in the paper the next day, and work to make it catchy, big-picture (regional, national, global), and specific to what the real "news" is in the story.
5. Do your best to keep the title of the release to no more than two lines, preferably one.
6. Mention Cary in the title.
7. Read it out loud to someone before settling on it.
8. Use capital letters in bold, 16 pt type.

Examples:

BAD	BETTER
Fire Gets Grant.	FEDERAL GRANT TO HELP CARY FIRE BRIDGE THE LANGUAGE BARRIER COMMON IN FIRE SAFETY
Police Look For Robber	GUNMAN AT LARGE AFTER OVERNIGHT HEIST IN CARY; OFFICIALS ASK FOR YOUR HELP
Citizens Reminded of Watering Rules	CONSERVATION THE KEY IN AVOIDING WATER SHORTAGES; CARY CITIZENS REMINDED TO FOLLOW WATERING RULES

## LEAD

1. The lead is the first line of the release and is your second chance to catch the editor's attention.
2. It should give the news in one complete sentence.
3. Keep it to no more than three lines, preferably two.
4. Like the title, you can be catchy and big picture—grab them.
5. Print it in bold type.
6. If the lead is several lines long, make it a one-sentence paragraph on its own.
7. Read it out loud to someone before settling on it.

## LEAD PARAGRAPH

1. The lead paragraph is the first paragraph of the release and is your final chance to catch the editor's attention.

2. The lead paragraph should contain all of the most important information needed by an editor to decide if the story is worth doing.
3. Remember "Rip and Read", a phrase referring to the old days of wire and radio when announcers would pull the story off of the teletype and read it without change.
4. Read it out loud to someone before settling on it.

### **THE QUOTE**

1. Always include a quote.
2. Make sure the quote offers something meaningful to the story, such as a sentiment, explanation, or minor fact.
3. Quote the highest-ranking person associated with the project/issue. In the Public Information Director's absence, consider only quoting Ben or Bill or department heads.
4. Keep the quote to no more than three sentences, preferably two.
5. Hear the voice of the person you're quoting in your head and write with his/her words, voice in mind.
6. Place the quote after the lead paragraph, not at the end of the release if possible.

### **BODY**

1. A good form for the news release is to follow the quote with the additional detail about the "real" news that really didn't fit into the lead paragraph.
2. If no detail is necessary, follow the quote with the history, background, or other data.
3. Always end with a phone number (including area code) and Web URL for more information.

### **PRIMARY CONTACTS**

1. Ideally, there will be three primary contacts, four at the most.
2. The first contact should be the Town of Cary staff member leading the project.
3. If two departments are sharing responsibility for the project or if an outside agency is strongly tied to the issue, list one person as a second contact.
4. The next contact should always either be the Deputy Public Information Officer.
5. Always list the PI Director as the last primary contact; include the PI pager number.

### **OTHER**

1. The news release q's are your best resource for ensuring that you cover everything you need to in a release. Make sure that whoever is requesting the release completes the appropriate q sheet-general, groundbreaking, etc—in its entirety.
2. Double check the date and all other numbers.
3. Keep the organization's "key messages" in mind, especially when writing the quote and the lead paragraph.
4. Try to keep the release to one page, but don't use less than 11 point type.
5. Have Ben or Bill read and "sign off" on all releases issued when the PIO is away.

6. Remember that the primary purpose of a news release is to meet the needs of the media, so don't send it out too early or too late.
7. Make sure you've addressed all the important information in the story by answering the interrogative pronouns:
  - **Who did it, was/is affected by it, knew about it, is the spokesperson...**
  - *What happened, is going on, should we think...*
  - *Where did it happen, is it going, was it found, were they seen...*
  - *When did it happen, will it happen again, will it go into effect, will we know more...*
  - *Why is it important, is it happening, was the action taken...*
  - *How can it be stopped, can it be started, can it be changed, should we react...*
  - *How much time did it take, money did it cost, pain did it cause...*
  - *How often did it go on, will it be reviewed, is it a problem...*

# KEY MESSAGES

## INTRODUCTION

Key messages are broad yet meaningful statements that articulate the organization's position or perspective on the high level issues surrounding a communications topic. Key messages go beyond basic facts and speak to commitments, beliefs, values, motivations, perspectives, and other aspects of the organization's culture that are driving an action or position.

Key messages should be developed for all external communications—scripts, articles, comments to the media, professional presentations, letters, e-mails. Typically, there are between two and four key messages for any issue.

## DEVELOPING KEY MESSAGES

1. Look beyond the facts and at a very high level to determine which of the following (or other) big picture issues are primary in the matter at hand:
  - a. Safety, health, welfare
  - b. Quality of life
  - c. Protecting/Impacting the environment
  - d. Responsiveness
  - e. Pro-action vs. Reaction
  - f. Following/Supporting/Enforcing laws, ordinances, regulations
  - g. Spending money/using resources wisely
  - h. Secrecy/Lack of trustworthiness
  - i. Employee performance
2. For each big picture issue, review the General Messages of the Organization, the Town's Mission Statement, Statement of Values, Council Goals & Initiatives for relevant ideas
3. For each issue, draft a compound or complex sentence that clearly and completely represents the organization's statement on the issue
  - a. Be confident, clear, and definitive
  - b. Express regret or sympathy or apologize if necessary
  - c. Use "we" statements
4. Run your draft key messages by the PIO or DPIO
5. Memorize each key message you've developed
6. If for an interview, do not let the interview end without delivering the key messages

## SAMPLE KEY MESSAGES

### Red Light Cameras

July 12, 2007

*Cary has 3 goals for the program: (1) reduce accidents; (2) help keep traffic flowing well by not allowing intersections to be blocked; (3) economically and efficiently expand police's ability to enforce traffic safety laws 24/7.*

*While Cary's program has always been about safety and never about making money, we're glad to report that it's operating at a level that does allow for a meaningful financial contribution to be made to our public schools.*

### **Reclaimed Water Misconnection**

August 2, 2007

*There's nothing more important to us than the health and safety of our citizens, and we're glad to report that there should be no long-term health risks to any of our families who drank the water.*

*We regret the inconvenience and concern this situation is causing our reclaimed customers, and we appreciate everyone's support as we do what's necessary to ensure that everything's functioning properly.*

*Regarding lawsuits, that's not our focus; we're working hard to do everything we can to find out what happened and do whatever's necessary to keep it from happening again.*

### **Cary Growth**

August 16, 2007

*Cary's moderate yet healthy growth rate is right on track with the rolling average target set by the previous Council in 2003.*

*People are drawn to Cary because of our reputation for providing great services and a high quality of life, which includes doing a good job of planning for and servicing new homes and businesses.*

### **Questioning the Town's Application and Interpretation of Procedures**

August 16, 2007

*At the Town of Cary, following processes and regulations is something we take very seriously, pay very close attention to, and are generally very good at.*

*As we do whenever concerns are raised, we will conduct a thorough review of this project to ensure that the matter was handled appropriately, and we'll provide a thorough response to questions once our analysis is complete.*

### **GENERAL MESSAGES FOR THE TOWN OF CARY**

Refer to these concepts when developing specific key messages:

1. Our organization—the Town of Cary—is proactive. We plan and manage for tomorrow.
2. The Town of Cary has/seek/values a high level of citizen involvement/input/participation/feedback.
3. The Town of Cary is committed to preserving and protecting our finite natural resources. We are committed to preserving the environment. We lead all other cities in NC in preserving and protecting natural resources.

4. Our organization is efficient and economical—Town services are a great bargain for the price. We are lean. We are fiscally sound, financially very well managed.
5. Our operations are open/transparent. We have nothing to hide. We follow the rule of law, support the democratic process, believe in the necessity of government—that there are things we can accomplish better as a group than on our own as individual property owners.
6. Our organization employs the best (responsive, effective, professional, expert, innovative, caring) staff in all of local government.
7. Our organization adheres to the highest standards of honesty, integrity, fairness, truth, and accuracy. We conduct our professional lives in the public interest.
8. Cary, NC has the highest quality of life of any place in the state, thanks in large measure to the work of our organization.
9. Cary, NC is safe, consistently ranked as the safest large city in North Carolina and in the top 10 of safest cities in America.
10. Cary is an attractive community.
11. Cary is the Technology Town of NC.

# HOW TO SAY IT

<b><i>Instead of...</i></b>	<b><i>Try...</i></b>	<b><i>Because..</i></b>
No comment.	While I can't address that specific issue, I can say that generally,...While I can't speak to that, I will say...	Merely saying "no comment" is wasting a good opportunity to get your message out.
I'm not sure, but I think the answer might be...	I wish I could help, but I don't know the answer to that. A better person to speak with is...	Guessing runs the risk of perpetuating misinformation that may never get corrected.
That's absurd, ridiculous, stupid...	That's not the case. We disagree. The facts/data don't support that. That's not going to happen. That exaggeration is not productive. Those comments aren't accurate or relevant.	Your point can probably be made without using value-laden words that appear harsh or judgmental..
That's a lie.	The facts are clear and they don't support that position/remark/statement/characterization..  We would disagree with that position/remark/statement/characterization.	Harsh and overly direct responses can appear unnecessarily rude.
Raleigh, Durham, Apex would be wise to... or ...could do a better job if they would...	All I can speak to with certainty is how we do things here, and in Cary, we...	We have neither the facts nor the proper context to accurately evaluate and comment on another entity's decisions/actions.
Personally, I think...	At the Town of Cary we believe...	The interview is being conducted because of your professional position, not who you are as an individual. At work, you don't have/give personal opinions.
As part of my job, I decided to...	The Town decided to...	Most things in the organization happen as a result of a team effort, which includes having the Manager or Council sign off on it, directly or indirectly. Also, you want the power of over 1,000 employees standing with you symbolically in your response.

<p>Off the record...or... between you and me...or ...just on background...</p>	<p>We don't go off the record. Maybe you should speak to the PIO</p>	<p>No one ever goes off the record in our organization because it usually ends up being part of the record and rarely just between you and them. If it needs to be said, say it or ask the PIO to say it.</p>
<p>We may have to raise taxes...or ...we may have to cut services..</p>	<p>We will need additional funds...or we will have choices to make...</p>	<p>Get to the real point and don't presume to suggest what Council or the organization might or might not do..</p>
<p>I don't have to give you that information... or ... I won't give you that information because it's part of the investigation and I don't have to.</p>	<p>While we appreciate your interest, state law doesn't support our discussing those details at this time since we have an active investigation.</p> <p>Thanks for your interest, but discussing those details right now could compromise our investigation, which I'm sure no one wants to see happen.</p>	<p>The law is on our side, so there's no need to alienate folks in the process of simply refusing their request.</p>
<p>That is a big problem...or ...huge catastrophe...or ... we really screwed up on this one...</p>	<p>This is quite challenging. We didn't do our best with this. As always, we're doing a comprehensive evaluation to see how we can improve.</p>	<p>Exaggeration could lead to a degradation in the public trust and/or to lawsuits based on an inaccurate perception of our role.</p>
<p>That's tough, too bad.</p>	<p>This is a sad and difficult time/situation for everyone involved.</p>	<p>Expressions of empathy and sympathy should be made completely and sincerely.</p>
<p>Council's got that all wrong...or ...Council made a bad decision...or ...we disagree with Council...</p>	<p>Our position as staff is to implement Council's vision for our community, and that's what we're going to do.</p>	<p>It's not productive to point out possible mistakes or conflicts. What's important is that issues get resolved so that we move forward with our work.</p>
<p>Some people in Cary have green grass and that's their life and they have nothing else to do.</p>	<p>Cary residents take great pride in their homes and yards, and having people respect their private property is important to them and to all of us.</p>	<p>Be careful to not let your own prejudices about what's important to others show in your response. Don't be contemptuous of the people you serve.</p>

# **CARY TO START BIENNIAL CITIZEN SATISFACTION SURVEY**

## **THIS WEEKEND**

CARY, NC – Beginning Saturday, January 23, consultants working for the Town of Cary will start contacting more than 400 Cary residents asking them to state their opinions on how well their government works for them. Topics will include solid waste, taxes, safety, quality of life, customer service, communications, street repair, and recreation programs. The scientific poll will be conducted via telephone through February 28, with citizens being asked to spend about 25 minutes answering about 60 questions. The survey's margin of error will not exceed +/- 5 percent.

"We hope that those who are called will take the time to give us the feedback we need by participating fully in the survey," said Town of Cary Public Information Officer Susan Moran. "We continue to learn a great deal about how we're doing and what's important to our citizens with our surveys, and we're looking forward to hearing from citizens again this year." Moran added that few other governments—local, state or federal—have a regular program of gathering citizen opinion in a scientifically valid manner. The Town of Cary has been conducting its citizen satisfaction survey every other year since 1998.

This is the seventh Town-sponsored citizen satisfaction survey focusing on the operations and services handled each day by the Town government. As with previous surveys, Biennial 2010 has three parts: (1) questions that are asked from survey to survey to give the Town an opportunity to see trends in its performance; (2) questions that change from survey to survey to give the Town information on current or emerging issues; and (3) demographic questions such as age, sex, race, and education that help ensure that the sample of respondents are a scientifically representative group of the total population of Cary.

"Just like Gallop, Nielsen, and other national and international pollsters, our consultants utilize long-standing scientifically tested sampling techniques and statistical analyses that allow the survey results to be generalized over the entire population even though not everyone in Cary is being called," said Moran.

All responses to the survey will be anonymous, and demographic information will only be used in the aggregate. However, respondents will be given the opportunity to give their identifying information if they are interested in participating in one of several focus groups that the Town's consultants will conduct in March as part of the study based on the survey findings.

Following a national request for proposals, Cary has contracted with BKL Research of Salem, VA to conduct the study and related focus groups at a cost of \$28,665. The survey report is expected in late March followed by the focus group report in late April.

Results from Cary's previous biennial surveys are available online in the [Research](#) section of [www.townofcary.org](http://www.townofcary.org).

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**PRIMARY CONTACTS:** Susan Moran, Public Information Officer, (919) 460-4951  
Ben Shivar, Town Manager, (919) 469-4002  
Deanna Boone, Deputy Public Information Officer, (919) 462-3908

## **CARY CONTINUES CAUTIOUS, CONSERVATIVE APPROACH TO BUDGETING FOR COMING YEAR**

*Town Manager recommends no change in property tax or solid waste fee but utility rates to rise*

CARY, NC – It will take about \$348 million next year to keep Cary one of the greatest places in America to live, work, and raise a family, according to Town Manager Ben Shivar's Fiscal Year (FY) 11 recommended budget. The total operating budget is a modest 3.7 percent higher than its FY 10 predecessor, which was adopted last June to fund the current year's initiatives. Proposed reductions and limited new capital projects will keep Cary's tax rate one of the lowest in the Triangle at 33 cents per \$100 of valuation and keep garbage, recycling, and yard waste fees the same at \$14 per month for residents.

"While we are beginning to see some signs that the economy may be improving, any recovery will be long and slow, which is why I'm recommending we continue into next fiscal year the very cautious and conservative approach that has kept core services intact and impacted citizens' quality of life as little as possible," said Town Manager Ben Shivar. New spending will once again be extremely limited, including further delaying projects and keeping our workforce lean." Shivar is also proposing no new debt for general government projects.

The Town of Cary's annual budget is divided into two parts: a capital budget, which funds bricks and mortar projects like roads, buildings, and utility lines; and an operating budget, which funds the equipment, supplies, vehicles, and people needed to run programs and facilities.

While the coming year's capital plan includes a handful of smaller projects such as open space acquisition, an elevated water storage tank, and the annual town-wide street improvement program, the primary driver of Shivar's proposed \$174 million capital portion of the budget is \$128 million toward the State-mandated Western Wake Regional Wastewater Management Facilities (WWRWMF), which will allow Cary, Morrisville, Apex, and Holly Springs to comply with the State's requirement to return water to the Cape Fear River Basin.

To pay for their share of the \$330 million project, Cary water and sewer customers will once again see a rise in rates. Shivar is proposing a 7.4 percent increase this year—about \$5.60 more a month for a residential Cary customer using 7,000 gallons of water. About 4.6 percent of the change is directly tied to the WWRWMF; the remainder of the rise (about 2.8 percent) is related to the recessionary slowdown in new development as well as lower per capita demand.

"We know this is a very tough time to raise rates, but we have no choice in whether or when to move forward with the WWRWMF," said Shivar, "and unfortunately, our utility customers can expect similar project-related rate increases through at least FY 14."

Shivar's recommended FY 11 operating portion of the budget totals \$173 million. The modest 3.7 percent increase from the current year's adopted operating budget is due in part to 12 new positions' being proposed, including four that will be needed for the new Cary Community Arts Center. Shivar is also recommending hiring three additional police officers to begin developing a new neighborhood crime prevention program as well as one school resource officer for the new Mills Park Middle School. At the same time, Shivar is recommending the formal elimination of 31 vacant positions, which will save the Town about \$1.5 million next year.

Over the last several years, Cary averaged 27 new positions each year just to keep pace with the growing community's needs. Counting the 12 new positions and the 31 eliminated positions the Town's total recommended staffing will be reduced to 1,140, or about 8.1 staff members for each 1,000 Cary residents -- one of the lowest staff-to-citizen ratios in the state for a large municipality and down from 8.5 at the start of FY 10.

The Cary Town Council's first budget work session is slated for May 18, 2010. Discussions are expected to include a review of the overall operating and capital budgets and the limited number of new positions' being recommended. Another work session is on the calendar for June 9 if needed. Work sessions are open to the public, begin at 5:30 p.m., and are held at Cary Town Hall.

In addition to attending work sessions, interested citizens are invited to comment on the proposed budget during two upcoming regular Town Council meetings: Thursday, May 27 and Wednesday, June 8. Meetings begin at 6:30 p.m. and are held in the Council Chambers at Cary Town Hall, 316 North Academy St.

Any changes to Shivar's recommended budget will be listed separately and voted on in conjunction with approval of the entire budget at the regular Council meeting on June 24. North Carolina law requires local governments to adopt a balanced budget by June 30 since the new fiscal year starts July 1.

The complete Town of Cary proposed budget is available at [www.townofcary.org](http://www.townofcary.org). Printed copies of the budget are also available for review at the Town Clerk's Office in Town Hall, at the Cary public library on South Academy Street, and at the West Regional Library, 4000 Louis Stephens Drive.

The Town of Cary's annual budget is a work and financial plan designed to implement the Town Council's vision for the community as articulated in the organization's mission statement and goals and initiatives.

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**MEDIA NOTE:** *Town Manager Ben Shivar will review the budget with an interested reporters in an informal, round-table fashion at 8 a.m. tomorrow, Friday, May 14 in the Administration Department of Cary Town Hall, 316 N. Academy Street.*

**PRIMARY CONTACTS:** Ben Shivar, Town Manager, (919) 469-4002  
Susan Moran, Public Information Officer, (919) 460-4951

## **GAWF TO BE CARY'S FIRST DOWNTOWN MANAGER**

CARY, NC – Cary Town Manager Ben Shivar has selected George "Ed" Gawf to serve as the community's first Downtown Manager. Gawf has been working in the field for 40 years and was Shivar's top pick from a pool of 280 applicants from as far away as Washington, Wisconsin, Texas, Maine, and Florida. Gawf and his wife will relocate to Cary from Scottsdale, AZ, where he is a partner with G and G Consulting, a planning and development firm. His first day on the job with Cary will be March 21, 2011.

"Ed's vast public and private sector experience and high-profile successes will be invaluable as he helps lead our efforts to develop a vision for downtown and the strategies to make that vision a reality," said Town Manager Ben Shivar, who noted that Gawf was integral in energizing downtowns in Boulder, CO, Palo Alto, CA, and Scottsdale, AZ.

As the Town of Cary's first Downtown Manager, Gawf will serve as the Town's key contact for those interested in downtown development and encourage downtown development by recruiting businesses and promoting economic opportunities. A resource to developers, businesses, and residents, Gawf will work with potential tenants and brokers to explore downtown real estate options, explain Town policies and procedures, and convey the needs and desires of downtown stakeholders to Town officials. He will also be part of the staff team that assists with planning and prioritizing downtown capital improvements, including identifying and recommending property acquisitions and sales.

"Cary is consistently ranked as one of the best places in the nation, and I'm excited about the opportunity to work with the community to bring more vibrancy to the heart of this great town," said Gawf.

Gawf's range of expertise includes city planning, downtown revitalization, downtown master planning, development entitlements, land use regulations, environmental programs, and organizational development. He is a charter member of the American Institute of Certified Planners and has a BA and MA from Oklahoma State University.

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