

Managing Your Public Relations

Asking for a show of hands at an adviser conference for those who have a public relations program will usually garner very few hands raised in the air. What many advisers fail to realize is that whether it is planned or not, your group has public relations. Every poster you hang, every event you sponsor sends a message to the public about your group. These messages can be haphazard, possibly even negative, if careful attention isn't given to sending the message and building the image you want your group to have.

Public relations is a process of informing, persuading, and interacting with various publics to shape their attitudes and actions. To be effective, public relations must be positive, organized, and integrated into your total program. Therefore, it must be planned, coordinated, and exist on a continuous basis. Follow these steps to plan a successful public relations program.

Identify a goal. As with other aspects of student activities, the first step is to identify your goal. What do you want to accomplish with your public relations? "To promote student activities" is too

broad—you need to be more focused. Some examples of a more narrow focus include:

- To encourage more students to participate in student activities.
- To demonstrate to educators and parents that students can gain

skills and knowledge from participation in activities that are just as important as academic knowledge.

Determine the key audiences that are most important to the goal you have established. They will fall into several categories and be

found both within and outside the school. Internal publics include people and groups immediately involved with the school system such as students, instructional staff, administration, support staff, parents, and school board members. External publics include groups such as community members, service clubs, civic organizations, church-related organizations, the Chamber of Commerce, business and industry, senior citizens, and legislators.

Prioritize your list. You likely don't have the time or resources to change the attitudes of everyone, so determine the people whom you most need to inform and influence to create better understanding of and support for

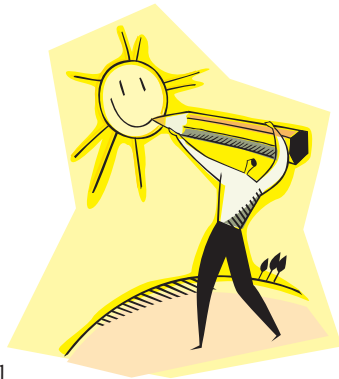
your activities. Prioritize your list of key audiences and select a few to target with specific activities.

Develop the key message points you wish to convey to your target audiences. In our media-saturated society, people are bombarded with messages and have become very good at tuning things out. Your message should be simple to remember and should be presented in many ways and many forms. Examples include:

- Participation in activities is for everyone.
- Student activities round out an education by helping students develop skills for life.

Plan activities that will reach your various publics with the message you have planned. It's important to keep in mind though that public relations is not some separate entity—everything you do conveys a message to someone: a sloppily painted poster with a misspelled word sends a negative image of your organization; a successful, well-organized event sends a positive image; lack of communication with those who need to know about your plans creates frustration and a negative image; following up an event with thank you notes to those who helped builds a positive image.

The activities you decide to pursue will be dependent upon the goal you have selected. Some examples



for reaching various groups are listed below.

Reaching Students

- Publish a student newsletter or a “Toilet Times” sheet for the restrooms
- Design a T-shirt for your group and have members wear it on special days.
- Be sure that every poster you create is carefully made and looks professional.
- Write regular articles in the school paper.
- Visit homerooms and provide information.
- Provide all new students with information about your club.
- Prepare presentations for other classes and organizations in the school.
- Present information programs to middle level and/or high school groups.
- Prepare bulletin boards or display cases that are informative and changed regularly.
- Develop an activities calendar for the month and distribute it.
- Set up exhibits or information centers in areas frequently used by students and staff.

Reaching Faculty and Staff Members

- At the beginning of the year, report your group’s goals for the year to the faculty and administration.
- Let faculty know of activity plans well in advance so they can plan their schedules accordingly.
- Schedule regular meetings with administrators for your officers to give updates about their work.

- Meet with departmental groups, or give reports at faculty meetings.
- Give special information to new staff members.
- Provide publicity to all staff about group achievements.
- Get staff members involved in your program.
- Prepare mid-year and end-of-year reports for staff and administration that reflect an evaluation of your program and activities.
- Send thank you notes or prepare a thank you banner for faculty and staff after major events in which their support was essential.
- Talk to administrators regularly about your group’s activities.
- Prepare an audio-visual presentation describing your activities and show it at a faculty meeting.

Reaching Parents and School Board

- Seek opportunities to present reports to the school board, PTA, and other groups.
- Prepare an audio-visual presentation describing your activities. Play it at open house or parents nights, and show it to the school board.
- Invite administration, parents, and board members to special programs or activities sponsored by your group, such as the end of year banquet. Send individual, personalized invitations.
- Send fliers home in school newsletters with information about upcoming events.
- Invite administration and school board members to attend your meetings.
- Schedule a pizza party with members of your group and the administration or school board to

chat about issues and areas of concern.

Reaching Community Members

- Organize service projects in the community such as blood drives, food drives, etc.
 - Sponsor programs for senior citizens, such as special showings of school plays, a senior citizen prom, or a youth conference with older adults.
 - Invite community members to serve as judges for competitive events such as Homecoming spirit week.
 - Write newspaper articles and send press releases about events.
 - Seek exhibit space at local malls or other businesses to inform the general public of your activities and accomplishments.
 - Utilize local cable access to broadcast important school events, or videos about your program.
 - Speak to local service and church groups and encourage them to publicly and financially support your program.
 - Establish business partnerships.
 - Contact local service clubs and arrange for exchange speakers.
 - Invite community resource people in to conduct programs.
 - Use community members as resources and speakers. Get them involved in your programs.
- Following these steps will help ensure that your public relations efforts build support for your program and send the message that student activities are a valuable part of the educational mission of your school.