

Quick and Easy Public Relations (how to get your agency's messages out)

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What is Public Relations?

“A strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics.”

What does it mean to think strategically about public relations?

- Proactive
- Goal
- Audience
- Message
- Key relationships



Proactive vs. Reactive PR

- **Proactive PR** = Identifying goals, audiences, messages and initiating communications
 - long-term, strategic process
- **Reactive PR** = responding to the media, residents, local officials, etc., or trying to hastily develop a relationship for self-serving purposes rather than developing long-term relationships to the benefit of both parties.

Being proactive helps you to control the message

- Basic law of public relations: The first one to tell the story has the best chance of controlling the message.





“You must control the message. And one thing that we’ve done very well is, we do tell our story. If we don’t tell the story, someone else will tell the story for you.”

*- Former Detroit Police Chief
(now gubernatorial candidate)
James Craig*

Step 1: What is the goal of your communications effort?



- What do you want to accomplish through the conversation?

Step 2: Who is your audience?



Step 3:

Constructing your message



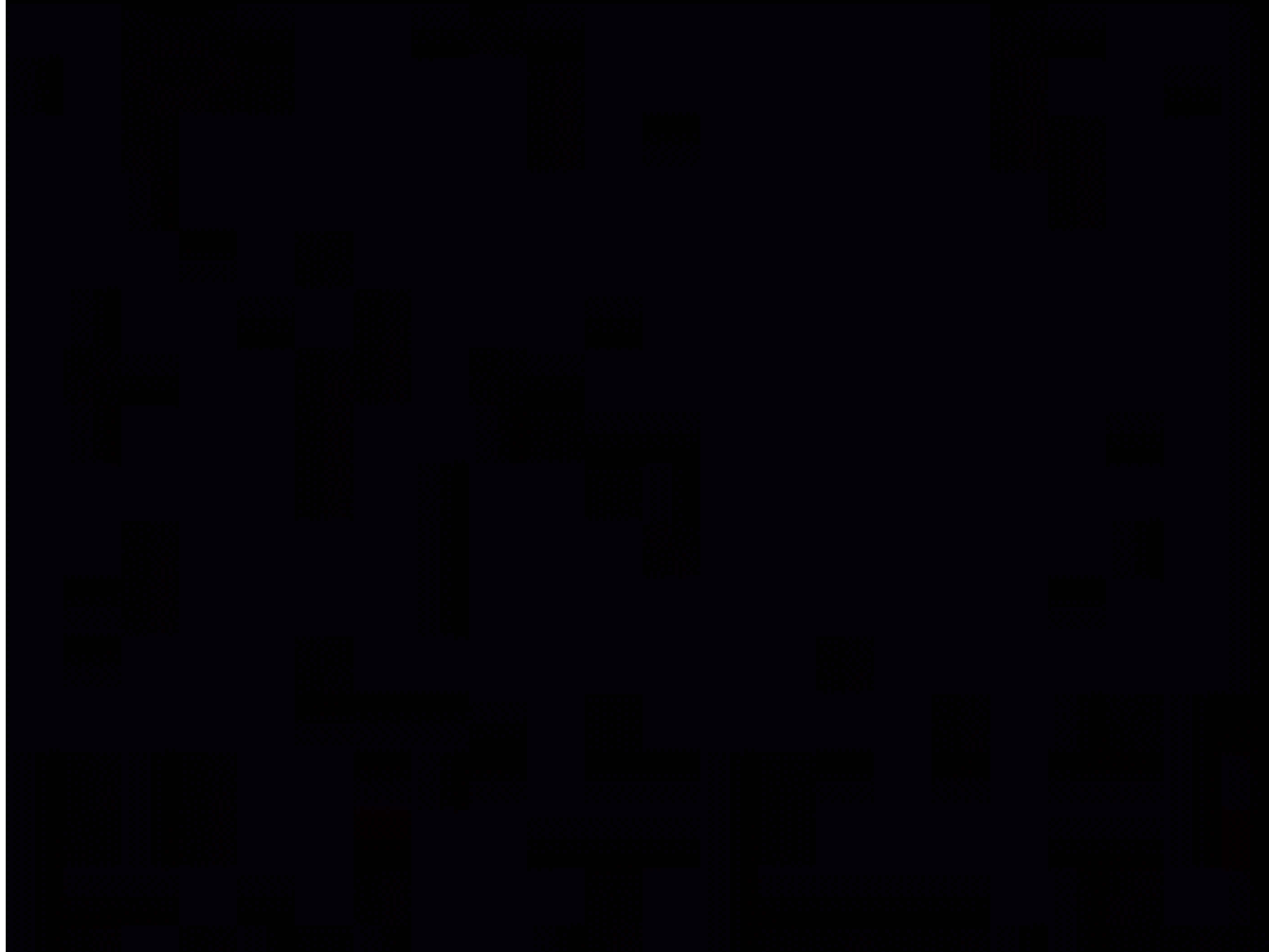
Elements of your message

- ✓ Achieving your goal,
- ✓ What you want the audience to know
(related to goal, of course)
- ✓ What the audience wants to know
- (WIIFM)

Critical to crafting your message: Avoid jargon!

JAR·GON

n. special words or expressions that are used by a particular profession or group and are difficult for others to understand



How to avoid jargon

- Try to think of a different word.
- Think about your audience & goal and what you're really trying to communicate.
- Ask yourself if an eighth grader would understand it.
- Have someone who is not familiar with *road speak* read over your work and give you feedback.
- Write in the active voice (not the passive voice).

What to avoid

- Industry terms
- Long words (find simpler terms)
- Long /run-on/compound sentences (split into two or more sentences)
- Passive phrasing
- Adverbs

Secondary messages

- Secondary messages are more general messages that reinforce the road commission “brand.”

Secondary messages

- Can be related to **brand elements** such as:
 - your agency's expertise in road construction,
 - your commitment to efficient operations,
 - Your dedication to financial responsibility,
 - Your responsiveness to the people you serve,
 - Your commitment to providing the safest roads possible,
 - etc.
- Can be woven into your discussion of your primary message.

The press release



- A good way to be proactive: Send out press releases
- Format matters
- Inverted Pyramid
- Lead paragraph
- Informative headline
- Release date
- Contact info
- Agency name
- Quote

Sample press release



ROAD COMMISSION **for OAKLAND COUNTY** **PRESS RELEASE PRESS RELEASE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Oct. 15, 2021



Contact: Craig Bryson, Public Information Officer, (248) 645-2000, ext. 2202 (e-mail: cbryson@rcoc.org)
Visit RCOC online at www.rcocweb.org

ADAMS ROAD PROJECT COMPLETION DELAYED UNTIL SPRING

Beverly Hills, MI — The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) has been informed by the contractor on its Adams Road resurfacing project, Square Lake Road to Long Lake Road on the Bloomfield Twp./Troy border, that the contractor will be unable to meet the contractual completion date for the project, meaning the project will extend into next year.

The project, which started in June, was expected to be completed in October. Southbound Adams Road in the project area has been closed during the work, while northbound Adams has remained open for local traffic.

The contractor, Pro-Line Asphalt Paving Corporation, of Washington Twp., has agreed to complete work on the northbound side of the road and put down temporary paving on the southbound side to allow the road to open to two-way traffic during the winter. The road will re-open to two-way traffic by Nov. 2.

“We are extremely disappointed in this contractor, and apologize to the residents, businesses and motorists who rely on this road on behalf of the contractor,” stated RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar. “We believe the contract was set up with sufficient time to complete the work within the contract parameters, even in an unusual year marked by COVID-related challenges and greater than normal rain. We believe the contractor simply failed to fulfill its obligations.”

Long-term relationships with media

- One key audience for any governmental agency: **The media.**



So, get to know the reporters covering you



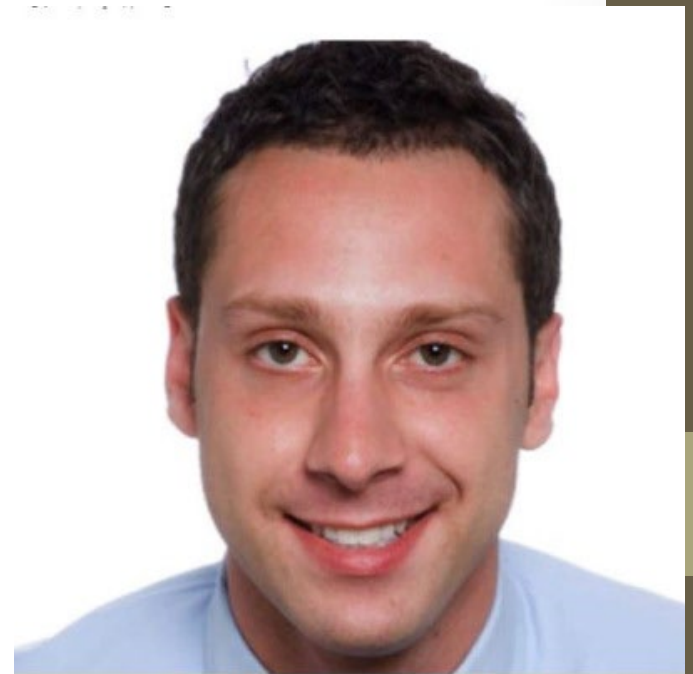
- ✓ Take time to talk with them.
- ✓ Answer their questions – even if the story seem unimportant.
- ✓ Respect their deadlines.
- ✓ Get to know them.
- ✓ Build a relationship with them.

The importance of availability

Availability: Make sure you are available to media – when they need you.

- It WILL pay off later

(Simon Shayket).



Thanks!!

Questions??



Dealing with the media



- You're about to call a reporter
- A reporter has just called you
- There's a TV crew on the way
- Or a member of the public is threatening to call the press

“I don't think a tough question is disrespectful.”

— Helen Thomas

Why should you answer reporter questions?



- We are funded with tax payer dollars.
- We **SHOULD** be able to explain how and why we are spending those dollars.
- **OR** why we do things the way we do.
- If there isn't a good reason for what we are doing, or the way we are doing, maybe we **SHOULD** re-evaluate.

Body Language

- Look directly at the reporter (TV)
- Stand or sit up straight; don't slouch
- Avoid frowning, negative expressions
- Avoid fidgeting
- Relax
- Don't cross your arms



Body Language

Signs of lying 	Using hands to improve speech 	Defensive 
Evaluation 	Raised Eyebrows - Disbelief 	Bored 

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Tips for Dealing with Difficult Reporters

- Most reporters are trying to be fair.
- A few aren't.
- Don't take it personally.
- Always keep your cool.
- Answer the question you want them to ask.
- Stick to the facts.



Know the facts

- If you're going to call the media, or the media has called you:
 - Make sure you know the facts of the situation



Press release vs. press conference vs. media pitch

- There are several ways to solicit media coverage.
- When do you use each?



On-Camera Practice

- **Scenario:**

Massive snow storm covered your county, with snow falling heavily for 12 hours straight. The roads continuously re-covered as soon as you plowed them, and you're really struggling to get the roads clear.

- Equipment is starting to break down.
- Drivers have worked long hours and need breaks
- The forecast is for more snow in the next 24 hours

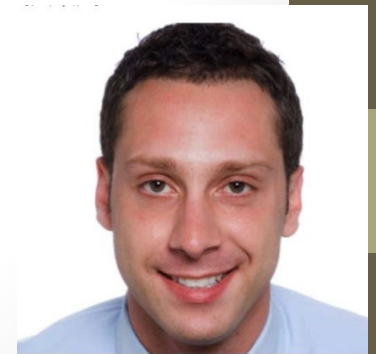
Reporters want to talk to you.

Things to keep in mind

- Goal
- Audience
- Message (primary and secondary)
- Body language
- **Note**: The reporter may not be the friendliest

A few other keys to dealing with media

- Availability: Make sure you are available to media – when they need you.
 - Make sure they have a cell phone number
 - Answer your phone if they call
 - If you don't know the answer to a question, tell them you will look into it and get back to them.
 - And do it!
 - Be available to talk to media about “unimportant” stories.
 - They'll remember when it comes to the important stuff.
 - Build positive relationships with reporters.
 - It WILL pay off later (Simon Shayket).



Media contact

- It's also important that you have one or a select few employees designated to speak with the media (the fewer, the better).
- This will ensure that the media knows who to contact.
- It will also help ensure the message from your agency is consistent.

So, what do you share with the media?

- Have something to say (message).
- WIIFM
- Think like a reporter:
 - Who?
 - What?
 - Where?
 - When?
 - Why?
 - How?
- Make sure you have formulated your message before contacting the media.





Scenario



- Your agency is proposing to construct a roundabout at a busy intersection.
- The roundabout is controversial, and some people are opposed, including businesses near the intersection.
- Some residents have stated they think the roundabout will lead to dangerous crashes and “blood in the streets.”
- Businesses think it will kill their business.



- Internally or when talking with contractors, using industry jargon can save time and convey specific details.
- But, remember: The media and most members of the public are not in the road business.
- They do not know what “HMA” or “cold patch” are.
- Say it in a way your grandmother would understand (unless she’s a civil engineer!)
- Journalism rule: Write in language that a eighth grader could understand.
- Why? People have a better chance of understanding what you are saying if it is stated simply and clearly.
- Remember: The goal is for people to understand your message.