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Public Relations



Public Relations Committee

Raising Rotary's public image is essential to a club's ultimate success. Effective public relations can greatly enhance the impact of club activities ranging from membership recruitment to community service. While many different groups in the club may be concerned with public relations, the Public Relations Committee is responsible for coordinating public relations efforts.

Selecting Committee Members

When choosing Rotarians for the Public Relations Committee it is important to select articulate Rotarians who are knowledgeable about Rotary International and the club and can be spokespeople for the club when dealing with the media. Rotarians who might ably serve on such a committee include:

- Media professionals
- Persons with ties to the media through business or other professional activities, such as advertising
- Individuals with writing or photography skills
- Civic, academic, or religious leaders within the community
- Web page designers and others with skills to create a club/community Web site

Public Relations Committee Responsibilities

- Presents information to the public about the club, Rotary, its history, goals, and accomplishments throughout the Rotary year, especially during Rotary Awareness Month (January);
- Works with club committees that are conducting service activities to publicize successful club projects through the local media;
- Creates a list of media contacts and regularly updates it;
- Responds quickly and accurately to media inquiries about club activities;
- Advises the club president on public relations matters;
- Communicates with key organizations and leaders within the community;
- Works with the district Public Relations chairperson to keep him or her informed of larger stories that may generate interest beyond the local community; and
- Works with the Magazine Committee to keep RI apprised of newsworthy club projects.

Preparing Committee Members

The committee chairperson should do the following to help committee members operate effectively as club public relations leaders:

- Inform committee members about the responsibilities associated with club public relations.
- Give committee members examples of past successful and unsuccessful public relations efforts discussing why those efforts did or did not work in order to apply lessons to current efforts.

- Provide committee members with a calendar of club and community events to facilitate planning.
- Prepare a list of visitors that may be of interest to the local media, including:
 - Ambassadorial Scholars
 - Youth Exchange participants
 - Group Study Exchange team members
 - District governor
 - Interesting program speakers

Working with Other Club Leaders

Although the Public Relations Committee is directly responsible for coordinating a club's public relations campaign, other club committees and officers can also play important roles in enhancing and sustaining Rotary's positive public image. Other committees that support club public relations include:

- Membership Development Committee, which can assist in recruiting qualified media representatives as members;
- Rotary Information Committee, which can ensure that new and existing members are knowledgeable about Rotary and club information;
- Magazine Committee, which can provide *The Rotarian* or Rotary regional magazine to local media and other community venues; and
- all service-oriented committees that may be conducting activities worthy of media coverage.

Additional information in this chapter includes:

Key Public Relations Concepts

Guiding Principles — A synopsis of key policies related to public relations.

Public Relations Resources — A list of materials and other resources available to support club public relations efforts.

Enhancing Rotary's Public Image — A summary of club and committee public relations responsibilities.

Utilizing the Media — Tips regarding attracting positive attention and working with the media.

Public Relations Appendices

Media Tools — A guide to public relations tools that can be used to enhance Rotary's public image.

Key Rotary Messages — A list of important Rotary facts and accomplishments.



Guiding Policies for Club Public Relations

Excerpted from the *Manual of Procedure* and *Rotary Code of Policies*.

Purpose of Rotary Public Relations

- Foster understanding, appreciation, and support for the Object and programs of Rotary.
- Promote awareness that good publicity, favorable public relations, and a positive image are desirable and essential goals.

Responsibilities of the Individual Rotarian in Public Relations

- Be fully informed about Rotary's Object, programs, and activities.
- Seek opportunities to further the aims and accomplishments of Rotary through personal, business, and professional contacts.
- Help their clubs become more identifiable in their communities by personally informing others about what Rotary is and does.

Dealing with Adverse Public Relations

- A club should counter misperceptions with well-directed public information and community relations efforts and, where appropriate, strengthen its service program.
- If a condition exists or a problem arises which may affect other clubs or RI, a club should advise the governor at the earliest opportunity so that a cooperative effort can be made to deal with it.
- It is the governor's responsibility to advise and assist clubs in preventing or solving local public relations problems. The general secretary shall assist governors and clubs, keeping the president and the RI Board advised and referring to them problems that may require their consideration.

Public Relations and Club Projects

- Sponsor a major community service activity each year.
- Actively seek to inform the public about the projects successfully carried out by Rotary clubs.
- Counter any negative perceptions about Rotary by creating positive service programs.
- Undertake, where feasible, both annual and continuing projects with which the club will be clearly identifiable and visible to the community.

Rotary and News Media Relationships

- Undertake appropriate action to improve relationships between Rotary and the news media.
- Take into account social and cultural conditions and the state of local media relations and consider initiating the following club and district activities to improve Rotary and news media relationships:
 - Talks to clubs by news media personnel on the role of the media
 - Small discussion groups comprised of Rotarians and news media personnel

- Forums or seminars attended by Rotarians and news media personnel
- Club awards for young journalists for the purpose of broadening their experience, the awardees to report back to the club thereon
- Inclusion of news media representatives in Rotary Foundation Group Study Exchange teams
- Increased efforts to bring representatives of the news media into club membership

Speakers Services

Rotary clubs should make available to groups in their community speakers who can effectively talk about Rotary.

RI Public Relations Award

Rotary clubs should take advantage of this award that recognizes clubs and districts that achieve outstanding media coverage of Rotary activities in their areas and that implement programs that demonstrably improve the image of Rotary in their communities.

Attracting New Members to Rotary through Public Relations

Rotary clubs should

- find ways and means of increasing the appeal of Rotary to the growing number of young persons who are occupying positions of responsibility in business and the professions;
- take measures to have appropriate weekly club programs better reported and identified with the Object of Rotary; and
- consider adopting more sharply focused activities as a means of providing greater public relations impact.

Public relations is important in attracting new members to Rotary and in retaining present members. The importance of public relations should be emphasized to Rotary clubs and, in particular, to club Membership Development committees.



Public Relations Resources

Materials Available from RI

The following is a partial list of RI publications and materials helpful to public relations. For more information please consult the *Catalog* (019-EN).

www.rotary.org — Web site containing information on public relations, including examples of successful public relations efforts undertaken around the world, sample press releases, tips, and suggestions.

PR Tips — Rotary club public relations success stories, press releases, fact-sheet updates, and other valuable public relations tips, available via e-mail on a regular basis by visiting www.rotary.org and registering as directed to become part of Rotary's electronic global PR team.

Effective Public Relations: A Guide for Rotary Clubs (257-EN)

Rotary Public Relations for the 21st Century videotape (269-EN)

Promoting Rotary on the Web (271-EN)

Public Service Announcements (PSAs) for print, radio, and television.

Human Resources

- Public Relations and Rotary's Image Task Force Members — Rotarians who are experienced and knowledgeable about promoting Rotary at the local level; contact your district governor for the name of the Rotary task force member who can offer guidance and counsel on how to get your club project in the news.
- Rotary International's Public Information Department — Staff members who can provide general public relations guidance; fact sheets that highlight Rotary's history, major programs, and service activities; graphics; and slides; and can help publicize local stories with a national or international appeal.

Phone: 847-866-3000

Fax: 847-866-8237

E-mail: pid@rotaryintl.org

- District committees (particularly the district Public Relations Committee).
- International, district, and club officers; Rotary Foundation alumni; Ambassadorial Scholars; and Rotary Youth Exchange participants — all of whom can serve as Rotary spokespersons.



Enhancing Rotary's Public Image

The practice of public relations varies throughout the world. Regardless of the cultural differences from one country to another, all Rotary clubs have audiences with which they should communicate. Clubs must ensure that the community is aware of Rotary and its activities and take positive steps to enhance the club's image. All club members share in this responsibility.

Effective public relations can take many forms, from promotion of the club's service activities in the club bulletin to newspaper coverage of an interesting speaker who visits the club. A positive public perception of Rotary and its members aids membership recruitment efforts and assists in attracting community support (financial and volunteer) for club service activities.

Public Relations Responsibilities

The RI Board has outlined the following club responsibilities related to public relations:

- Maintain positive news media relations;
- Seek publicity for successful service projects;
- Utilize *The Rotarian*, *Rotary World*, Rotary's regional magazines, and other tools and techniques to promote Rotary's aims and accomplishments;
- Encourage Rotarians to inform their friends and associates about Rotary;
- Cultivate the understanding of community leaders, young people, and special interest groups that should be aware of Rotary;
- Take positive steps to prevent or correct any attitudes within the community that may harm Rotary's reputation and limit its effectiveness; and
- Obtain full representation of the news media in club membership.

Public Relations Committee Responsibilities

The only way the public can learn about Rotary is if Rotarians make a conscious effort to share their knowledge with non-Rotarians. Proactively creating a positive public image for your club must take place both internally — within the club — and externally — within the community.

Within the club, you can educate members about their responsibility to promote public relations by

- Encouraging them to be fully informed about the Object of Rotary, Rotary programs, and club activities; and
- Urging them to seek opportunities to further the aims and accomplishments of Rotary through personal, business, and professional contacts.

Within the community, you can enhance the public's perception of the club and Rotary International by

- Working to promote club projects and activities that appeal to the local media;
- Developing a club brochure and/or Web site that provide information about Rotary International and your club; and
- Cultivating relationships with the local media.



Starting a Public Relations Campaign

Effective public relations campaigns require time, effort, and planning. It is important to work closely with the club president and other committee members to develop a strategy before or at the beginning of the year. A practical starting point for such a strategy is a timetable that lays out the plan for the year. An effective way to create a plan is to lay out a blank calendar for the coming year and mark those dates when your club will be conducting potentially newsworthy activities, such as service projects that directly affect the community.

Targeting Audiences

Ensuring a positive image of Rotary in the community requires public relations targeted at different groups or audiences in the community, including:

- The local media (newspaper, radio, television)
- Specialized media that cover a specific topic such as education or health
- Local government officials
- The business community
- Students and educators
- Civic leaders
- Community organizations
- People directly affected by Rotary service projects

For example, a business writer for the local newspaper might be interested in a club's career day for local students, while an education writer might wish to interview an Ambassadorial Scholar.

What Is News?

The type of information that typically interests reporters and others in the media varies from place to place. The following subjects are generally considered to be newsworthy:

- Community projects or activities
- Community emergencies
- Timely human interest stories
- Local stories that illustrate a national or global trend
- Activities of prominent community members
- Stories that have a strong visual element

The following are examples of specific types of Rotary stories that can be effectively promoted:

- Outstanding volunteers
- The interaction of people in developed and developing countries
- Local Rotary and/or Rotary Foundation projects
- Participants in Rotary exchange programs such as Youth Exchange, Ambassadorial Scholarships, or Group Study Exchange
- Human interest stories of people benefiting from Rotary service
- PolioPlus activities — particularly in polio-endemic areas

For Your Information

Further information that can help you best prepare for working with the media can be found in Appendices 1 & 2 — “Media Tools” and “Key Rotary Messages.”

Preparing to Work with the Media

To make good use of your media contact’s time, as well as your own, it is wise to be prepared when promoting a story. Some ways to organize your effort include:

- Knowing the facts of the story you wish to promote;
- Appointing an articulate, knowledgeable spokesperson;
- Preparing a fact sheet; and
- Writing a news release or “media alert.”

Establishing a Relationship with the Media

Journalists are often pressed for time; however, establishing a good, working relationship with representatives of the media is essential to your club’s public relations efforts. The following methods have helped clubs establish relationships with members of the news media:

- Bringing news media representatives into the club as members;
- Developing awards for journalists;
- Inviting members of the news media to speak to the club about their exciting profession; and
- Conducting discussion groups or seminars and inviting Rotarians and members of the news media to attend.

Media Outlets

Most communities are served by a variety of media outlets, including:

- Local newspapers
- Local radio stations
- Local television stations

Before choosing a particular media outlet, it is important to ensure that the project or activity that you wish to publicize matches the media’s format. For example, stories with a strong visual element may appeal to the local television station.

There is such tremendous competition for media time and space, it may be worth considering the following less “traditional” media sources to promote the projects, activities, and work of your Rotary club:

- Online publications
- Trade publications
- Local access cable television stations
- Radio public affairs talk shows
- Corporate newsletters
- Newsletters of other community organizations



Appendix 1: Media Tools

The following tools can be used effectively to enhance your club's public image:

Spokespersons — Accessible, informed, and articulate Rotarians who are well-versed about Rotary and the club. While the club's president is the club's primary spokesperson, the public relations committee can help prepare other club members to fill this role.

The Press Release — A brief report that answers the basic questions of Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How? It should quickly communicate to the media information that can be used as the basis for a news story.

Photographs — If high-quality, they can greatly improve your press release's chance of being used. Be imaginative when taking a picture; try to convey action or tell a story. Newspapers generally require a black and white photo. Be sure to include a caption with the photo describing the event and naming anyone pictured. Use a professional photographer whenever possible.

Fact Sheets — Valuable background information on a particular topic that helps broaden the story from a specific local example to Rotary's volunteer efforts around the globe. Rotary produces a number of fact sheets on Rotary programs. Include them in your media kits or produce one on your own.

The Idea Letter — More personal than a press release, it presents an idea for a story and an offer to help develop it. It should be carefully tailored to a specific reporter and medium.

News Conferences — A conference with a group of local journalists should only be called if the club has an important announcement of significant interest to the community. Ordinarily, issue press releases and work with reporters on a one-on-one basis.

Rotary Public Service Announcements (PSAs) — In some countries, radio and television stations are required to allot a limited amount of air time to public service announcements (PSAs). They are broadcast at no cost and are used mainly by nonprofit groups to announce special events or messages of special interest. In other countries, there may be an opportunity for nonprofit groups to purchase air time at a discounted price. A variety of public service announcements are available from Rotary International; consult the *Catalog* (019-EN) for more information.

The Media Kit — Background information that is especially useful at events and other planned activities. Ideally, the kit is a pocket folder with a Rotary identifier that contains general material about the club and Rotary, as well as information about the specific event or activity taking place.

Basic Rotary Information — In any communication with the public or the media, be sure to include basic Rotary information. Too often, a Rotary activity is reported, but little about Rotary is actually communicated.

For Your Information

"Key Rotary Messages" on the next page provides essential information about Rotary that should be conveyed to the public and the media.



Appendix 2: Key Rotary Messages

Following are sample messages you may wish to select, adapt, or use to create the messages you want conveyed to the media.

- Rotary works to improve the quality of life for all people.
- Rotary is an international service organization of 1.2 million business and professional men and women who, as volunteers, address needs of their home and international communities.
- Rotary exists to do good in the world. Rotary initiates local and international service projects to promote world understanding and peace and improve living conditions for people of all ages and cultures. An example is the PolioPlus program through which Rotary is working to eradicate polio by the year 2005.
- Rotary's strength lies in the volunteer service of its membership, an international network of business and professional leaders implementing a wide range of programs to meet human needs.
- Rotarians are men and women of integrity who represent a cross-section of business and professional backgrounds. Volunteers of all ages, they work to address community and international concerns.
- Rotary's strength is that it is both international and local. With more than 29,000 clubs serving communities in 162 countries, Rotary is ideally situated to address such problems as poor health and sanitation, hunger, and environmental deterioration.
- Through PolioPlus, Rotary leads private sector participation in the global effort to eradicate polio. Its financial commitment, expected to be valued at US\$500 million by 2005, is multiplied by the thousands of volunteers working in more than 100 countries to support childhood immunization.
- Rotary's volunteer and financial assistance in vaccination efforts is helping to eliminate polio in nation after nation, and region after region. Polio eradication cannot occur, however, until the disease disappears from all nations and all regions.
- Rotary's community-based leadership in target countries was a deciding factor in the World Health Assembly's choice of the goal of polio eradication. Rotary International is the key private partner in the global fight to eradicate polio.

