



**DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE**  
**RESEARCH & EXTENSION**  
*University of Arkansas System*



# **Volunteer Leader Training Guide**

## **Effective Communication With the Public and the Media**

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### **Introduction**

With what seems like a never-ending number of blogs, social media and news outlets competing for your attention, our communication networks are larger than they have ever been. While this largess may be good for public accountability, an organization's message is more likely to be lost in the crowd.

One way to ensure effective communication with the public and the media is by developing a communications plan. Following a prescribed plan can help you better reach the public and the media. It cuts down on confusion about your organization and can help in recruiting new members or attracting people to events.

### **Target Audience**

- EHC leaders, adult audiences

### **Objectives**

Participants will learn how to:

- Develop a communications plan
- Recognize behaviors that encourage trust
- Interact with the media

### **Main Teaching Points**

- Good communication requires planning
- Trust improves communication
- The media's limited role

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## Lesson Materials

- PowerPoint presentation
- Communications Assessment handout
- 13 Trust Behaviors handout
- Evaluation

## Suggestions for Teaching

- Make appropriate number of copies of handouts.
- After loading the PowerPoint and giving your introduction about what the audience will learn, engage the audience in Activity 1 and encourage them to think about a group or communication issue personal to them. This will also give them a starting point to refer back to when filling out an evaluation at the end of the program.
- Pass out handouts as you start on each topic.
- End with the evaluation.

## Developing a Communications Plan

**Activity 1:** Identify one of your organization's events or issues that you want to share with the public or the media. What do you want the public or media to know?

Good communication, whether it's with the public or the media, requires planning. There is no winging it when it comes to getting your point across.

A communications plan is a written document that outlines your communication goals and how you anticipate achieving them. The plan doesn't have to be burdensome. It can be as simple as determining when you will announce an event to the public. The plan should be designed to meet your needs.

Basic steps to develop a plan:

- **Assess**
  - Purpose – Before you can start communicating with the public or the media, you need to define your situation and what you want to achieve.
    - *Example:* Club membership is dwindling. We want to be known or better known in the community so we can attract new members or potential sponsors.
  - Assets – Recognize your strong suits or existing relationships that can promote your cause. Identify potential communication partners such as newspapers, radio stations, local bloggers or community groups that can share your message. This is where you are encouraged to think outside the box.
    - *Example:* Do you have a communications committee? How many media outlets exist in your community? Who can be your spokesman?

- Audience – Define who you ultimately want to hear your message and how they prefer to communicate (i.e., social media, telephone, mail).
  - *Example:* Potential EHC members, beginner gardeners, etc., want a monthly newsletter or follow you on Twitter.
- **Define the Message**
  - Short term (event based) – If you have an event coming up and want to attract more people, then you develop a short-term message to spread. Short-term messages often make up a larger, long-term plan.
    - *Example:* Good Will is opening a new store.
  - Long term (the year) – This is the information you want the public to know about your organization, whether it’s your mission statement or program. It is reinforced throughout everything you do. It helps establish credibility and tells the public your organization intends to be around and involved in the community for the long haul.
    - *Example:* Good Will’s mission is to put people to work.
  - Methods – Determine how you want to share your message.
    - *Example:* Good Will uses social media, mailers, radio, etc.
    - *Example:* It may be time to start a Facebook page or blog so people can find current contact information.
- **Draft a Timetable**
  - Deadlines – Write down specific dates you want to accomplish something by. Knowing that you must put out a press release by a certain date or that you want to have developed a relationship with a particular organization by a certain date will help you avoid procrastinating. It also puts members on the same page of what to expect.
    - Month by month – List under each month what you think you can realistically accomplish.
- **Follow Through**
  - Consistency – Being consistent in sharing your message is necessary. If the public goes months without hearing from you, you no longer exist. Too many organizations start and fold or, even worse, start a web site and then never update it.
  - Reassess – Missed a deadline? Set a new one. Use the timeline to help evaluate if you are reaching your goal.

**Activity 1 Follow-Up:** Refine the message you created during the first part of this activity into a short-term or long-term communication goal, message or action step using the communication planning skills you just learned.

## Recognize Trust Behaviors

Think of a time when someone did something that made you trust them less. Was it something they said? Something they did?

Creating an atmosphere of good communication requires trust. For example, a reporter's source is someone the reporter trusts to tell them accurate and credible information. The source, in return, trusts the reporter to keep his or her identity confidential and report the information accurately.

Trust behaviors are also important when building or enhancing a relationship with your community. Showing that you can be trusted to do what you say you will establishes credibility, which goes a long way in making your organization and its events valued by the public.

**Activity 2:** Use the **13 Trust Behaviors** handout to identify one trait you or your organization does well and one trait which you or your organization can improve.

## Media's Limited Role

Consider this – nearly 3 million people live in Arkansas. The *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, however, delivers newspapers to 163,933 homes on weekdays and 244,864 homes on Sundays. Less than 10 percent of the state's population subscribes to the only statewide newspaper. (Of course, that number may end up being higher because several people in a household may read the newspaper).

Regardless, this is important to know because it shows how limited a role the media can have when trying to reach people in any given community. It is also important to know that media outlets have cut staffing by great numbers during the recession, so a reporter may be doing the job of four others.

What does this mean?

The Bad News

- **NEWS TRIAGE**

With less space for publishing community news and fewer reporters on hand, media outlets have to prioritize their coverage. Your event or organization might not be deemed important enough for coverage.

The Good News

- **HYPER LOCAL NEWS**

Residents are transforming frustration over a lack of community news into becoming news sources themselves. Ordinary residents have created community blogs and Facebook pages to inform others of local news – school sports highlights, lost and found pets, crime, public meetings and events.

Smaller organizations that might not have had a voice in their community newspaper or television station before can now share their information themselves with a wider group of people through these online community venues.

## Interacting With the Media

Do	Don't
Return phone calls/emails as soon as possible	Lie
Provide accurate information in press releases	Guess on dollar figures or other facts
Provide access for interviews	Repeatedly ask if your event is being covered
Talk in complete sentences when possible	Overuse or abuse "off the record"
Give reporters advance notice of an event	Offer reporters gifts or anything that may create a conflict of interest

- Know what the reporter is writing about so you can think beforehand what points you want to get across.
- Review your information prior to the interview. Feel free to refer to notes and keep those notes in front of you to refer back on.
- All conversations are on the record – unless you say “this is off the record” before the statement is made.

What does “on the record” mean? Anything you say can be printed.

What does “off the record” mean? You and the reporter have agreed prior to your statement that what you are about to say will not be printed and will be held in confidence.

- A good reporter will read back your quotes if asked.
- Call the reporter or editor if you notice any mistake in an article or story that you were involved in, otherwise the error will be repeated as truth in future stories. Newspapers and television stations use their past coverage as their archive.

*“I’m a reporter, not a recorder.”* – Do not expect newspaper stories to include every piece of information about an event or a meeting. Articles are not meeting minutes.

**Activity 3:** Have one person stand up in front of the group and tell a brief story about himself or herself. Audience members should listen and try and take notes on what the person said. Go around the room and share a few of those notes to see how accurate they are and whether anyone was able to capture a true quote or exactly what the person said.

## References and Helpful Links

- [http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/sub\\_section\\_main\\_1059.aspx](http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/sub_section_main_1059.aspx)
- <http://www.crttbuzzbin.com/a-facebook-primer/>
- <http://www.hieran.com/comet/howto.html>
- <http://www.slideshare.net/MeTApresents/effective-communication-and-working-with-the-media>
- [http://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource000642\\_Rep664.pdf](http://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource000642_Rep664.pdf)
- <http://www.publicityinsider.com/release.asp>