

CHRIS:

- 1. Welcome to the presentation**, Working with the Media—Crafting a Positive Message for Your Jurisdiction. Thank you for attending today
- 2. Here is a brief overview** of what we will be covering today:
 - The *Public Relations Overview* provides a simple definition of PR and outlines its early beginnings.
 - *Plugging in to Media Outlets* discusses *traditional* and *online* media and how they can be used to communicate your message.
 - *Developing a Media Plan* gets into considerations when creating your PR plan.
 - *Crisis Management* covers general guidelines for preparation and response to emergencies, including the role of media and the role of the assessor.
 - *Tales from the Media Front Line* provides examples of sensationalistic media coverage and shares anecdotal examples of media coverage failures and successes.
 - *Core Elements of an Effective Message* includes the five “Ws,” who, what, when, where, and why; the seven “Cs,” (and we are not talking about sailing the ocean) and eight factors of newsworthiness.
 - *Wrapping it Up* provides last-minute helpful hints that ensure that the right message is being sent
- 3. Public Relations Overview**

Public Relations can be simply defined as the “shaping of public opinion using available communication tools.” These tools include:

 - Advertising
 - Public forums
 - Traditional media, and
 - Online media, websites, and social media—Some of these online tools have been around long enough that they are starting to be viewed as traditional media, especially by younger generations.
- 4. The Public Relations Society of America** updated its definition of public relations through a crowd-sourcing survey conducted in 2011 and 2012. Their current definition states that:
“Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics.”

I would like to share with you a couple comments from two IAAO members who are experts in public relations.

The first is from Larry Stein, Chief Deputy for Oklahoma County Assessor Leonard Sullivan. Larry is formerly a national award winning multi-media reporter, talk show host, Communications Director for the Oklahoma GOP, Deputy Press Secretary to the Governor, and Chief of Staff for the Lt. Governor. He also co-authored an F&E article in October 2102 on “The 2012 Property Tax Revolt” in North Dakota and has also written about the implications of natural disasters and assessment caps.

Larry states,

One of the most important things we can do in our office is to plainly, simply, and effectively communicate with our customers. Helping them understand what we do helps both of us because we can sharpen and tune our message to address their misunderstandings and concerns. The more often we practice our message by interacting with our customers, the better off we are explaining the complicated and most misunderstood job of being an assessment officer.

The next quote is from Sam McPherson, who now serves as Public Information Manager for the office of Davidson County Assessor George L. Rooker Jr., AAS. Sam also is a former national award-winning print and television journalist and hosted a weekly television public affairs program. He was chief of staff for Nashville's mayor and later a major department head in its consolidated city-county government for 20 years. He has been an active IAAO member since 2002.

(Note: The Davidson County office won the IAAO Public Information Award in 2009, earned the Certificate of Excellence in 2012 and the Outstanding Jurisdiction Award in 2013.)

Sam states,

Regardless of expertise and commitment, an assessor is only appreciated in the public arena when people know about his or her performance. Opinion can be shaped quickly by the media, and today, that includes social media which can change things overnight. Every assessor needs a media plan as shown in this new IAAO webinar. I highly recommend that you use the webinar to learn how to craft a media plan for your office or fine-tune the one you have in place.

I will share more comments from Sam later in the presentation.

5. In government, PR can be used to:

- *Influence public opinion*—Putting the right ideas out there can quickly change public perception, especially if there is misinformation out there or biased points of view.
- *Influence legislation*—The media loves controversy, and proposed new legislation is all about controversy. Legislators and the press have a mutual desire to express polarized views about competing legislation.
- *Create a positive response to disasters*—PR can be used to send the message that the system is working and everything is being done to mitigate the effects of disaster and resolve a crisis.
- *Inform taxpayers*—Within an assessing jurisdiction, providing as much advance information as possible can be key to better informing taxpayers and freeing up staff time for other responsibilities. In a nutshell, PR can create a positive impression for your jurisdiction.
- *Provide transparency*—Information that is volunteered without prompting is more easily accepted and garners public trust. This serves jurisdictions by reducing staff time required to answer questions and resolve problems presented by taxpayers.

6. You may have seen articles *Fair & Equitable* about the benefits of transparency and using technology to provide 24/7 access on jurisdiction Web sites. These are success stories that demonstrate the advantages of making appropriate information available in an accessible format.

7. Let's get started with a brief history of public relations

- People have always tried to influence others by crafting a message that supports their goals and objectives. The caveman pictured in the slide is an early example of how that influence might have been exercised.
- Formalized Public Relations came into existence at the start of the 20th Century during the Industrial revolution. It was a way for big business to establish better relations with its workers and the public while making enormous profits and wrestling with a budding sense of democracy in the United States.
- PR differs from marketing because it is selling image and reputation rather than products and services.
- In modern times, truth and openness are key tenets of legitimate public relations campaigns.

<http://www.corporatewatch.org/?lid=1570>

8. Auspicious (or favorable) beginnings signified a bright future in the early days of PR.

Openness was encouraged by early pioneers such as Advisor to John D. Rockefeller, Ivy Lee. This set the stage for PR to become recognized as a legitimate profession. Lee is also known for introducing the press release.

In a brief aside, the original version of this presentation included the word “auspicious” to see if then Communications Committee Chair Wade Patterson, had ever heard of the term. It was decided that the word “auspicious” is unknown in Wade’s home state of Oklahoma. Since then it has caught on there, because Wade has been using it ever since. My apologies to my many friends from Oklahoma...

http://www.slideshare.net/Niikay/public-relations-origins?src=related_normal&rel=5410226

9. Lee established three basic principles in his work:

- Tell the truth
- Be accurate
- Have access to top management

Lee also provided positive advise in the early days of PR.

“Public relations means the actual relationship of the company to the people and that relationship involves more than talk. The company must act by performing good deeds.”

This is good advice about positive relationships that applies to more than just PR.

<http://www.corporatewatch.org/?lid=1570>

10. Another early pioneer of PR and author of the first book on PR was Edward Bernays.

On a side note, Bernays was a nephew of psychoanalysis pioneer Sigmund Freud.

Bernays claimed that the function of PR was to:

- Interpret the client to the public by promoting the client
- And, interpret the public to the client by operating the company in such a way as to gain approval by the public

http://www.slideshare.net/Niikay/public-relations-origins?src=related_normal&rel=5410226

11. Arthur Page of AT&T was a forefather of modern public relations.

- He presented a positive “spin” on the role of PR in corporate communications and created a model for ethical media relations.
- The Arthur W. Page Society continues to promote his ethical ideals today.

Page practiced seven principles of public relations management.

- *Tell the truth*— Let the public know what’s happening and provide an accurate picture of the company’s character, ideals and practices.
- *Prove it with action*—Public perception of an organization is determined 90 percent by what it does and 10 percent by what it says.
- *Listen to the customer*—To serve the company well, understand what the public wants and needs. Keep top decision makers and other employees informed about public reaction to company products, policies and practices.
- *Manage for tomorrow*—Anticipate public reaction and eliminate practices that create difficulties. Generate goodwill.
- *Conduct public relations as if the whole company depends on it*—Corporate relations is a management function. Corporate strategy should always be implemented with consideration for its impact on the public. The PR professional should be a policymaker within the organization.
- *A company’s true character is expressed by its people*—The strongest opinions—good or bad—about a company are shaped by the words and deeds of its employees. As a result, every employee is involved with PR. Jurisdictions should support each employee’s ability to be an ambassador to customers, public officials, and anyone else they interact with.
- *Remain calm, patient and good-humored*—The groundwork for public relations is consistent and reasoned attention to information and contacts. This can be difficult with today’s instant communication on the Internet but it will pay off in the long run.

<http://www.awpagesociety.com/about/the-page-principles/>

http://www.prmuseum.com/awpage/awpage_att.html

<http://www.slideshare.net/kellimatthews/history-of-pr>

12. QUESTION TIME: What are the key principles of public relations?

- A. Auspiciousness
- B. Truth and openness in business practices
- C. Listening to the customer
- D. Honesty
- E. Transparency
- F. All of the above (except auspiciousness)*

13. Next we examine the media outlets that are available to deliver a public relations message. You may notice that some points are repeated in this presentation as they are important points that are worth repeating. First Manny will look at traditional media then we will dive into the world of online media. Manny?

MANNY:

14. In-person communication is traditionally the most powerful way to communicate.

Advantages are that

- Nothing can replace direct human interaction.
- It allows people to see facial expressions and judge credibility.
- Audience are likely interested in what you have to say (otherwise they would not have come)
- In person meetings tend to address local issues and areas of immediate concern

Disadvantages of in-person communication include:

- It's difficult to predict comments and questions
- The size of audience is limited.
- Credibility can be lost if you are not prepared.

Here are some tips for in-person communication:

- Know the size of your audience in advance if possible
- Set an agenda in advance and allow for Questions & Answers, but limit it to agenda topics
- Set expectations for meeting conduct
- More people = more formal
- Assign a moderator keep things on track
- Consensus is not the goal

<http://emailclient-expert.blogspot.com/2011/01/disable-conversation-view-in-outlook.html>

<http://www.briansolis.com/2008/07/new-communication-theory-and-new-roles/>

15. Next are radio shows and talk shows:

Some advantages are:

- They reach a potentially wide audience of listeners who are interested in the topic (or they would change the station)
- They allow controlled, limited interaction and immediate response to phoned in questions.
- Maintaining a focus of the primary message can be easier than an in person meeting
- The broadcaster acts a moderator and keeps the program on topic

Disadvantages

- It is real time —if you make a mistake it can't easily be corrected after the fact. If the program is recorded a mistake will live on.
- Like in-person meetings, credibility can be lost if not prepared.
- Communication is primarily one-way with limited interaction from a few listeners.
- There are limited cues from the audience to help gauge reaction

Here are some tips to follow:

- Ask for interview questions in advance and allow time to prepare responses
- Prepare written responses to provided questions and other hot topics that may arise
- Refer to notes as needed—no one is looking at you except the host. (This works for Webinars too).
- Prepare in advance.

http://betf.blogspot.com/2011_07_01_archive.html

16. Newspapers/Magazines/Brochures offer other traditional media options.

Advantages of these print media include:

- They allow concise written presentation of your message and advance review and approval of content.
- Printed materials allow more comprehensive and detailed coverage of issues.
- Printed materials can be adapted for public media, in-house newsletters, trade journals, brochures, and fliers
- Printed materials create the impression of permanence and durability over time.

Some disadvantages are:

- Printing is expensive if you are printing your own materials
- Lead time is needed to prepare content
- There can be creative restraints
- Printed media can have a short shelf life depending on the format
- Articles and reports may be subject to interpretation and selective sampling of content by journalists

Tip for using print media:

- Use print media for detailed explanations of complex issues
- Use print media for articles or topics that are not constantly changing
- Use letters and positions statements to set the record straight on issues that may be misunderstood due to confusing rhetoric
- Write the article, READ the article, edit the article, READ the article, edit the article....then publish the article!

<http://www.yoozpaper.com/>

<http://www.reducedprinting.com/blog/2011/06/21/a-magazine-sets-your-organization-apart/>

17. Next is Press Releases/Letters to Editor/Opinions

Advantages of these types of communication:

- They can add clarity to issues by informing with facts
- They can provide focus on a specific topic
- Are ideal for reaching a narrow geographic area
- Can be easily adapted to other public media such as brochures, fliers, etc.
- Letters and Opinions are not subject to selective editing

Disadvantages, especially for press releases are:

- Press releases are not often used by media, because they are viewed as self-promotion that conflicts with paid advertising
- Letters to the editor and opinions may have a lower percentage of readership than other kinds of articles
- They have a short shelf life and are more in the moment.
- Press releases may be subject to interpretation and selective sampling of content by journalists

Here are some tips to consider:

- Consider press releases and opinions as a way to inform the public about specific issues that are poorly understood or skewed by media coverage.
- Use letters and opinions to set the record straight on issues that may be misunderstood due to confusing rhetoric.
- Follow up with key media contacts, either by phone or e-mail, after the initial press release to establish interest.

<http://www.yoozpaper.com/>; <http://www.reducedprinting.com/blog/2011/06/21/a-magazine-sets-your-organization-apart/>

18. Television

Advantages of television coverage include:

- TV maximizes the opportunity to engage an audience.
- TV is the closest to reality and so it offers authenticity. If you saw it on TV, you “experienced” it or you “saw it with your own eyes.” – So consciously or unconsciously TV has a level of credibility.
- TV can establish a central idea and then help it resonate through other media platforms (think Superbowl commercials that then propagate on the Internet) .
- Coverage, reach, and repetition are benefits of TV

Disadvantages of TV include:

High Cost—although messages can be placed affordably on public service channels they will have a more limited viewership there.

Audience attentiveness – how many times are you half watching TV while checking your Facebook posts?

DVR – recorded programs may be subject to editing or skipping over content.

Next, Chris will cover aspects of online media, but first...It’s question time.

http://tvworks.egta.com/background/10_advantages_of_TV.php

http://www.unc.edu/courses/2005ss2/jomc/170/001/ch15_oguinn.pdf

<http://www.eknazar.com/dallas/Topics/Parenting/topicListCategoryDetail.php?id=4051>

19. QUESTION TIME: If you MUST choose, which is preferable for PR purposes?

- Traditional Media
- Online Media

20. New(erro) Media

- The term *New Media*, or online media, refers to online technologies that have emerged since the early 90s. Most IAAO members are on the Internet and are aware of major types of online media, including social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, LinkedIn for professional relationships, blogs, and content sharing sites such as YouTube and flickr.
- New media has made significant inroads by expanding its presence on mobile devices in the past twenty years. Online media is constantly evolving to connect many different platforms to as many people as possible. One of its most defining characteristics is interactivity.
- While some forms of online media may be more effective than others when it comes to public relations, each new media approach can be used to enhance the interactive PR experience.
- Online media can occasionally include video programs and print media that have been converted to a digital format that allows interactivity.

<http://www.wisegeek.com/what-are-the-different-types-of-new-media.htm>

<http://jcommunicators.wordpress.com/>

21. First we take a look at websites:**Advantages of websites are:**

- They allow rapid posting of information to a broad audience
- Information can be posted and is accessible to anyone, anywhere, and anytime (24/7)
- Dedicated sites provide easy access to business information
- Websites can change frequently thereby keeping information current and fresh

Disadvantages can include:

- Reliability (if the website is not updated on a regular basis)
- Information may not be interpreted correctly or used appropriately
- Difficulty reaching the right people. There is less selectivity about who the message is reaching
- Crashes and downtime
- Can attract bad publicity if content is not carefully monitored with appropriate controls
- *the advantages of a Web site far outweigh the disadvantages*

○ Tips

- KISS (keep it simple silly?) – strip away all the filler content – clean, lean website – focused
- Keep up to date
- Speak the “customer” language – not organization lingo
- Provide good customer service

<http://blog.thecompanywarehouse.co.uk/2010/10/06/advantages-and-disadvantages-of-websites-for-business/>

<http://www.angelfire.com/pro/ximelagatran/advdisadv.htm>

http://www.gerrymcgovern.com/nt/2004/nt_2004_08_23_blogging.htm

<http://www.defencehacker.in/2012/01/remote-file-inclusion-tutorial-for.html>

22. Broadcast e-mail:

It is a simple and effective communications tool that helps network members stay in touch electronically through various discussion groups.

Advantages

- Rapid posting of information to a broad audience – Quick and Easy
- Greater selectivity about who the message is targeted to
- “Physical” Reminder – think old postcard mailers
- Customization!
- Inexpensive – no postage

Disadvantages

- Can be viewed negatively by recipients if sent too frequently or with irrelevant content – think SPAM
- Maintaining lists
- Easy to disregard

<http://www.digitalpursuit.com/broadcast-email.cfm>

23. Social media:

Advantages

- Personalize their experience – create an experience
- Rapid posting of information to a broad audience
- Today’s customers want to be “spoken to” they want a collective experience that comes across multiple channels – traditional and social
- Making new connections and renewing old connections
- Boosts links to your website

Disadvantages

- Subject to rapid development of opinions both good and bad (and sometimes caters to the lowest common denominator)
- Need to commit resources to managing your social media presence – responding to feedback and producing new content
If handled poorly it can backfire.
- No prefilter to identify fact from fiction (editors prefilter information appearing in traditional media and managed Web sites)

Tips

- Safety – be conscious of your reputation. As Sam McPherson stated earlier, “things can change overnight.”

<http://www.museion.ku.dk/2012/05/some-advantages-of-social-media-as-a-tool-for-public-health-science-communication/>

<http://www.businesslink.gov.uk/bdotg/action/detail?itemId=1081912566&type=RESOURCES>

24. Webinars:

Advantages

- Provide information on focused topics
- Greater participation #'s
- Cost effective (travel expenses, photocopies, etc.)
- Convenient
- Access – can be saved and retrieved later
- Interactive aspects – can voice opinions, give feedback, take polls, add comments
- Stay connected to the presenter and other participants even though they are not in the same room.

Disadvantages

- Interaction – presenter can sometimes be little more than a voice on the other end
- Can't gauge the level of understanding because you can't see their expressions – that level of synergy is lost.
- Experience – pictures and graphics cannot always convey the same information that can be gained from a tactile experience.
- It is difficult to gauge audience interest and engagement compared to in person meetings
- Location – distractions by other activity in the office or home – phone on mute – answer questions – webinar taking place on the background of their desktop

Tips

- Include interactive questions throughout the presentation to engage the audience and give them a sense of participation (polls, questions, comments – online or via voice)

http://www.ehow.com/list_7495125_advantages-webinar.html

<http://samsonmedia.net/blog/2012/06/how-to-use-webinars-to-grow-your-business/>

http://www.ehow.com/about_5050141_disadvantages-webinars.html

25. Podcasts, blogs:

Advantages

- Podcasts – syndicated, subscribed to and downloaded automatically
- Podcasts – download what you want to – huge advantage compared to radio - Radio is there to listen and get entertained, but with podcast gives people the opportunity to get involved and the choice of what they want to do with that piece of information.
- Brings people together to converse at one place – increases social circle
- Increases knowledge - Provide information on focused topics
- Promotes visibility/traffic to your website
- Can be a positive way of getting feedback, and to keep your finger on the pulse – as readers react to information
- Improves writing skills
- \$ - make money

Disadvantages

- Easy to start – hard to maintain - TIME
- Writing coherently is one of the most difficult and time-consuming tasks for humans to undertake
- Can make organizations look like DIS-ORGANIZATIONS
- Provides limited or no interaction with the audience
- And sometimes caters to the lowest common denominator

Tips

- Manage with facts, not opinions – use hard, defensible, compelling data

<http://www.esoftload.info/top-7-valuable-advantages-of-blogging>

26. I have to share with you that my son David thinks Facebook is passé and basically for old men and grandmas. His current thing is direct messaging, use of live video, and real-time group conversations using an advanced headset. He watches YouTube on his iPad while playing interactive computer games on his PC, and talking to friends using Facetime on his iPhone all simultaneously. Ahh, to be 16 again.

Next Manny will talk about developing a media plan.

MANNY

27. But first, it's question time again.

Does your office or PR department officially use social media (YouTube, Facebook, LinkedIn) in the office for PR purposes?

Yes, we do

No, we don't

Don't know

28. When dealing with the media, it is wise to have a media plan, so that all materials and communications can have a uniform look and "voice."

News releases, brochures, and opinion editorials can all communicate a message about your organization that is consistent and what you want to say. You cannot control what members of the press write about you, as we will talk about in a little while, but you can control what YOU say and the image that you want to present to the community.

http://www.condenaststore.com/-sp/Let-me-through-I-m-a-spin-doctor-Cartoon-Prints_i8638498_.htm

http://www.abccentralcal.org/Member_Services/PR_Guide_for_Contractors/Developing_a_Media_Plan.aspx

<http://marketing.about.com/cs/publicrelations/a/prplan6steps.htm>

<http://elitewebmail.com/privacy-policy.php>

<http://www.michaelmccurry.net/2010/11/12/whats-leadership-success-inspiring-performance-or-driving-results/>

29. Planning –What is your "plan?"

To develop a plan you first have to figure out what your message is.

Ask questions like:

- What is your mission?
- What are your goals?
- What is the "overarching" result you wish to achieve?

The answers will provide the direction that your media relations strategy will take.

What are your objectives? Your objectives relate directly to your identified goal and should be measurable.

Are they to:

- Build goodwill among your community?
- Create and reinforce your image?
- Inform and create positive perceptions regarding your services?
- Assist you in introducing a new service?
- Mitigate the impact of negative publicity?

In other words, what message(s) do you want to get across to your targeted "publics?"

Objectives should be specific, measurable, results-oriented and time-bound.

They should also be in alignment with overall business goals

Do your research

- Who is your audience?
- Who are your key “publics?”
- Who is your target audience? (demographics)

Target Audience — Identifying specifically “who” you are trying to reach will help in developing key strategies and what tactics (actual actions) will work best. Audiences can be the news media themselves, policy makers, community leaders or the general public. Often target audiences are broken down even further.

- What media outlets do they use?
- How do they get their information?
- How do they prefer to get their information?

<http://www.ots.ca.gov/Grants/files/pdf/Developing%20a%20Media%20Relations%20Plan%203-08.pdf>

<http://prosintraining.com/ssm/2012/02/before-you-jump-in-plan/>

<http://prosintraining.com/ssm/2012/03/goals-strategy-measurement/>

<http://www.chrisbrogan.com/social-media-strategy-X>

30. Strategy Development

Now that your goal has been identified, it’s time to develop your strategy — your approach in meeting your goal and objectives. Strategies are not specific tactics, but rather they represent the “who” and “what” and the “how” of meeting your stated objectives.

For example, if your objective is to generate more news coverage for your program, a strategy might be to foster relationships with appropriate reporters. The tactics within the strategy might be a news conference, letter to the editor or regular news releases.

Key Message and Story Angle Development

The first step in developing your story for media consumption is identifying the key messages you want to communicate to your target audience.

- What message do you want people to remember?
- Are you asking them to become aware of an issue, alter their opinion or change their behavior?

By narrowing down your focus, and repeating your key messages often, you’ll have better success in reaching your audience.

Once you have determined your key messages, it’s important to develop your **media angle** or “**hook**.”

- What is it about your program or event that makes it newsworthy, links it to the community or affects the public?
- Is there a current trend affecting your issue?
- Is there a unique identifier or branding image that can be easily associated with your media campaign? Logos, icons, and simple items like notepads, pins, hats, can all be used to create a strong sense of identity.

The more you can simplify the message, the more likely your chances for success.

Tactics

Tactics are specific tools used or actions taken to reach your target audience(s) and assist you in meeting your goal. Tactics always flow directly from your stated objectives and goal and they are never done simply for the sake of doing something.

They are done with a specific intent and end-goal in mind.

Which tactic(s) you use will, again, be based on your overarching goal and your identified target audience.

For example, if you are trying to encourage the use of bicycle helmets among children of a specific ethnic population, the tactics used to communicate your message will be very different than if you were trying to reach adult men with anti-DUI messages. The channels through which these two groups receive information are likely to be very different.

<http://www.ots.ca.gov/Grants/files/pdf/Developing%20a%20Media%20Relations%20Plan%203-08.pdf>

http://www.iconfinder.com/icondetails/34712/128/beos_eyeball_view_watch_icon?r=1

Matthew McClintock – eye

31. When developing communication tactics:

- present article topics by phone or e-mail (depending on media preference)
- Provide full details for media events (date, time, place, agenda)
- Always approach established contacts first; observe the courtesies of the relationship
- Establish a timeline for follow-up with contacts
- Establish routing protocol for unsolicited contacts from the media.
- Ask if the media outlet wants press releases or article ideas from you.

In other words, find out which media sources want to establish a working relationship with you.

Most local media outlets want your news.

32. Lastly, it will be important to create an updated, comprehensive media kit to help in distribution of your media materials.

What is a Media Kit?

A press kit, often referred to as a media kit in business environments, is a pre-packaged set of promotional materials of a person, company, or organization distributed to members of the media for promotional use.

Why do you need one?

If reporters are on a tight deadline to finish a story, they are going to look for the fastest and easiest way to get the information they need. Media kits are also great tools for communicating important points about your company to potential new customers and partners. The information is easily accessible in one central location (especially if it is online), and you can still print copies of your media kit for conferences, tradeshow, and targeted media members as needed. But by posting the information on your website, you can save a significant amount of time and money in printing and shipping fees.

What should be in it?

Business Facts

- Write a brief synopsis of what your jurisdiction does and why you are unique.
- Include your mission statement, goals and any other pertinent information about your business.
- You can write this in the form of “Frequently Asked Questions” or use succinct paragraphs to describe the important facts you want to convey.

History

- This page contains all of the data about the history of your business.
- You’ll want to include photos, the date you founded your business and why you started it. To interest readers, also add your thoughts and personal comments.
- If you don’t have a lot to share, you may want to include this information on your “Business Facts” page.

Products/Services

- It is very important to list all of your services and the benefits of each in your media kit.
- An outsider should be able to read this page in just a few minutes and know exactly what you sell and why people buy it.
- Depending on the data, consider using brief paragraphs with headers or a list with bullet-points.

Bios

- On this page, provide biographies of the key leaders at your organization and their photos.
- Write short paragraphs that are interesting and easy-to-read.
- And rather than using a pre-written resume, add pertinent anecdotes, quotes and other unique criteria that establish credibility for each individual listed.
- Include information about birthplace, hometown, education, business experience, awards, and any other vital facts you want media members to know. Also, add some personal tidbits, such as marital status, family information and hobbies enjoyed outside of work so readers can relate to the administration.

Current News

- Entice the media, and let readers know that your business is up-to-date by including current news, industry trends and exciting events in your media kit.
- List all of your press releases, published press clippings, video samples, business testimonials from customers, case studies, speaking engagements, articles, and other activities.
- Also include company brochures, logos, photos, identity standards, and potential story ideas to help media members get necessary data quickly.
- If you are in the process of obtaining press clippings, just include whatever information you have now, and make an effort to add to this section on a regular basis.

33. Measurement is an essential element in implementing any social media strategy. That being said, measurement without goals or a strategy to attain those goals is useless.

Measurement should be the hand that guides our strategy and adjusts our techniques to get us closer to those goals. Measurement is one aspect in a larger system, providing information we need to adjust our strategies and techniques.

According to Chris Brogan, president of Human Business Works, in a blog post titled [Social Media Strategy – Aligning Goals and Measurements](#), “Measuring the effectiveness of your efforts is vital to knowing you’re making progress. Remember that diets (strategies) often need adjusting along the way. It’s measurements that tell us this.”

It’s like this: without clear and attainable goals for the organization and a strategy that will get the organization closer to those goals, there is no point in measuring. Brogan continues, “Strategy is essentially the diet, but the goal might be weight loss, muscle growth, cholesterol reduction, allergy aversion. See how it’s not one-size-fits all? Before you know which diet to start, you need to know the goal.” Strategy without measurement is as useless as measurement without strategy.

Measurement is an essential yet complimentary aspect of figuring out the answer to the question: “Is what we are doing working?”

34. Here are 9 Tips for Effective Media Relations

1. Develop solid relationships. Take the time before a crisis strikes to get to know the key reports in your local area.
2. Learn about the media work cycle. Journalists have a tough job, just as we do. Learn their deadlines and meet them.
3. Always be clean and truthful...more to come on this.
4. Don't go off the record. If possible, always stay "on the record" when talking to a journalist. Going off the record only creates dilemmas for the journalist and potential problems for you. You don't have to offer any information that you do not want to offer, but you should never offer background information that you do not want to be attributed to you or the organization.
5. Relax. A journalist will assume that you have something to hide if you appear withdrawn or nervous, and this is an even more important consideration if you are doing a broadcast interview. Remember you are being given an opportunity to present your side of the story, so just relax and relay your thoughts.
6. Stay on message. Determine the key points you want to get across in the interview. Regardless of the interviewer's questions, continue to come back to these key points. Turn negative questions into positive responses.
7. Prepare. Anticipate the tough questions that journalists may ask. Keep the responses brief and positive.
8. Be positive and enthusiastic. Have an open face. You want to be perceived as the "good guy" that YOU ARE. Don't appear on television with a scowl on your face. Don't sound anxious or annoyed when talking with a reporter over the phone.
9. Reiterate your main point. Be repetitive. Be repetitive. Be repetitive. When you want to make a point, keep coming back to it.

<http://applesandoptimism.com/tag/millionaire-matchmaker/>

<http://www.publicspeakingtip.org/speaking-qualities/enthusiasm.php>

35. When developing a media plan it is important to avoid the impression you are a spin doctor.

- The term *spin doctor* was coined in the United States around 1980 to describe a political press agent or publicist. The term is generally perceived as derogatory because it implies deception, propaganda, and manipulation to achieve a desired perception. This is not the reputation that an ethical PR representative wants to acquire.
- Transparency and honesty are the only way to effectively counteract the perception of "spinning."
- The media are generally experienced at getting information that is newsworthy and attracts the attention of their audience. They have a pre-existing expectation that a PR representative will put a positive spin on the information that is provided. The media does not necessarily interpret the information the way it was presented. It may sometimes seem as though the job of the media is to "unspin" the message and interpret in ways that can be confounding.
- The media frequently encourages the spinning of issues as they play opposing sides against each other. Two sides that differ greatly in their interpretation of a situation can drive media headlines and create greater interest in an issue.

<http://www.nku.edu/~turney/prclass/readings/government2.html>

<http://www.savethepostoffice.com/spin-doctors-examine-post-office-financials-patient-goner>

36. Some of the positive things a PR officer can do include:

- commission advertising, coordinate community events, ensure a Web presence, and design and distribute brochures and other informational materials
- above all avoid the perception of misinformation

37. Establishing the hierarchy of reporting and accountability is especially important. Everyone in a jurisdiction should know who the official **authoritative** media contact person or persons is for particular disciplines.

Primary Media Contacts

- Usually it is the head of the department or designated public relations/media staff.
- Primary contacts are typically responsible for coordinating Freedom of Information requests, and organizing policy announcements.
- Sometimes, especially in a large jurisdiction like mine, the hierarchy includes interagency crossover dictated by legislative mandates, a civil service commission or merit employment commission.

I would like to share another comment from Davidson County Public Information Manager Sam McPherson. Sam says,

I have witnessed too many catastrophes caused by a lack of basic understanding of best practices in dealing with media and taxpayers. Some of those were caused by lower rank employees who were either disgruntled or thought they knew what they were talking about, but didn't. It is important to let all assessment employees know who the approved contacts for media are. They should be warned that while they may want to be helpful, inquiries should be directed to those people who are trained to handle them and may have knowledge of details or policies the initial contact may not have. By the same token, the Assessor should keep the PIO informed of any issues or events which may cause an inquiry. (The relationship between the Public Information Officer and Commissioner on the television series "Blue Bloods" serves as a good example of how that relationship should work.)

Secondary Media Contacts

- It may be useful to have secondary contacts for specialty topics or more routine responses. Secondary contacts are valuable when the primary spokesperson is unavailable and an immediate response is required.
- At times it may be necessary to use **expert resources** (both internal and external technical staff) to make complex information understandable by the media and the public. It is preferable to prepare responses from expert resources in advance so they can be reviewed by the primary spokesperson. Expert resources add validity to responses

Front-Line Workers

- Staff that interact with the public need to understand the hierarchy of communication and be prepared to direct information seekers to the correct person.
- Due to the "fishbowl effect" generated by transparency in government, the actions and comments of all staff must be coordinated.
- Front-line worker should always be authorized to direct the media and the public to pre-existing sources of authoritative information such as a Web site or preprinted brochures.

Reference IAAO *Standard on Public Relations*

38. The format for media plans should be defined in a policy manual.

Media plans should contain:

- Goals of the plan
- The Primary Message to be conveyed
- The media outlets that will be used
- Timing and frequency of messages
- The primary audience

Media plans should also contain:

- Who is responsible for delivering the message
- Damage control options and worse case scenarios if warranted
- Details of changes to laws/eligibility changes/public meeting locations/etc. that affect the message

More information can be found in the IAAO *Standard on Public Relations*

<http://www.nku.edu/~turney/prclass/readings/government2.html>

39. Question time

Does your jurisdiction have a formal PR Department with assigned staff?

Yes

or

No

40. Next, we switch topics and discuss a very important role of public relations in the assessor's office, crisis management. It is important to understand the interrelated roles of the assessing office and the media in crisis situations. Understanding these roles can make a significant difference in outcomes.

Here is a telling quote by the Director of the Institute for Crisis, Disaster, and Risk Management
"Public sector emergency management has the objectives of preserving the lives and social welfare and protecting the property of a defined population (city, county, state, country, region, etc.). Emergency management has typically been the province of government and not for profit organizations such as FEMA and the American Red Cross. These organizations exist because the population at risk requires their services: mitigation, preparation, response, recovery."

<http://search.comcast.net/?cat=web&con=homepage&q=FEMA+Crisis+Management+Protocols>

John R. Harrald

Director, The Institute for Crisis, Disaster, and Risk Management

The George Washington University

Washington, D.C.

Here is another comment from Sam McPherson that relates to disaster and crises management.

Sam says,

How some assessors can handle public relations and information management may depend to some degree on their official relationship with the public (in other words, whether they are elected or appointed). This does not negate the need for a media plan or designation of official contacts, but it may affect how aggressive they can be in shaping their approach. This may be a consideration particularly during crisis situations, such as floods, tornados, and terrorist attacks when public safety issues are at the forefront.

When Nashville had its 200-year flood in May 2010, the Mayor wanted all efforts coordinated through his office and emergency management agency. Although the mayor shares equal footing with the assessor, being elected by the same voting base, his leadership role made sense because it eliminated bad information from being communicated to the public or between the numerous agencies involved.

The mayor called on the assessor office to take the lead in quantifying the physical damage and assessing the financial loss by inspecting more than 236,000 parcels in a two week period. The assessor also proposed policies and legislation to mitigate the financial effect on taxpayers suffering damages. Our office worked closely with the mayor and the state assessment division of the comptroller's office to provide tax relief through state legislation. We communicated the results to affected taxpayers through media, mail notices, our website and social media. We developed programs explaining the relief programs with simple forms to file for relief online.

By being proactive, the assessor received a great deal of praise from both media and the public. The mayor's provision of a central command post was a good call, resulting in excellent cooperation between agencies and accuracy in information provided to the public. Sometimes it's best to stick to your area of expertise.

- 41.** Crisis management protocols are an important way to ensure things run smoothly when bad things happen.
- When managing emotional aspects, show empathy for the difficulties encountered during a crisis.
 - Give control to others by showing victims where they can find information to help themselves recover.
 - Provide useful positive facts. information is empowering to people that may feel helpless in the face of disaster.
 - Commit resources—say what is being done to help victims.
 - Personalize the message by pointing to benefits and positive outcomes for individuals and families.

Adapted from James E. Lukaszewski, *ABC, APR, Fellow PRSA*, Seven Dimensions of Crisis Communication Management: A Strategic Analysis and Planning Model.

42. It is important to understand roles in particular situations. Crisis situations [e.g., such as hurricane, flood, tornado; and manmade disasters such as terrorist acts, 911, riots] are an instance when appreciating these roles can make a significant difference in outcomes.

The media's role:

- Is to act as an information resource by conveying facts and instructions to the public so they may act appropriately.
- The media can also provide facts discovered during the reporting process to crisis management stakeholders.
- They can report on what supplies and resources are needed to respond to a crisis.
- They can act as a public safety communicator by conveying instructions to the public so they may act appropriately to increase physical safety and minimize harm.
- The media is also a public advocate, serving as watchdog to point out deficiencies and failures in current systems.

43. In the assessor's office, disaster response should always take precedence over everything else. A disaster response plan should be developed and kept on file.

The assessor's role is to

- Provide information to first responders and media about the state of affected areas before and after the crisis in order to minimize harm
- Maintain expert credibility as an authoritative source of property-related data provided in a timely manner
- Relay adjusting information as a follow-up to the initial crisis (e.g., information about adjustments to property values)
- During a crisis situation, communication between organizations is not necessarily governed by hierarchical relationships and therefore it requires extra effort to be effective.

44. The IAAO *Standard on Public Relations* states

Crisis Plan

The assessment office should have a written plan for handling crises and coordinating with other governmental agencies. The plan should define roles within the assessment office and all personnel should know their roles. Guidelines to be followed need to be specific. A single spokesperson should coordinate interaction with the news media in a crisis and be certain that all information released is accurate and precise.

The slide depicts images from assessment software used by Morgan Gilreath, Jr. of Volusia County, Florida to identify damage to property after a cataclysmic event.

- 45.** In a time of crisis the assessor should coordinate with other agencies, to determine what kind of assistance can be offered. In Los Angeles County, where Manny works, depending on the event, the office responds with the following services:
- Information on property tax postponements is coordinated with the County Tax Collector
 - Property Tax Relief information is provided to taxpayers (Misfortune and Calamity, and Decline in Value)
 - Information on property such as location, square footage, bedroom and bath count is documented for insurance purposes.
 - Building data, building records, and old permits are sometimes provided to the local Building and Safety offices.
- 46.** Defining roles in the office can ensure smooth operation in the face of challenges.
- Decide who will provide information? Is it the Public Information Officer, management, or a designated spokesperson.
 - Establish emergency points of contact for your staff and for the public.
 - Staff needs to know that it is safe to return to work during a crisis. Are work locations inaccessible due to a disaster? Are there alternate work locations if the office is closed?
 - The public should be informed about where to go and who to contact to apply for your agency's services.
 - At the office. Make sure that the public service desk staff and phone staff are prepared and informed regarding disaster-related services that are provided.
 - Established Local Assistance Centers can strengthen the effectiveness of an emergency plan. Make sure that a Local Assistance Center is adequately staffed and the necessary overtime is approved for staffing. Make sure that staff is well informed regarding services, and that plenty of information fliers or brochures are available.
- 47.** Your office should coordinate with local media and relief agencies
- During a crisis your Public Information Officer or spokesperson should send a press release to the media:
 - Identify what services are provided and locations to obtain such services.
 - In California for example, tax relief for disaster is called the Misfortune and Calamity exemption.
 - Contact various media sources, print (newspapers), television, radio, and your own sources (website and social media).
 - Have staff and information available at FEMA Disaster Recovery Centers or other assistance centers.
 - Assistance Centers will enable the most contact with the public that will need your services.
- www.disasterassistance.gov, 1-800-621-3362 (FEMA)
- Other national and international disaster relief agencies can be found at <http://www.disastercenter.com/agency.htm>.
- 48.** Here is an example of a press release regarding the 2008 Sayre Wildfire in California and the Misfortune and Calamity property tax relief. Most notable is the contact information telling those in need how to apply for services.
- 49.** Here is close up showing the contact information.
- 50.** Here is an example of detailed application instructions for Property Damaged or Destroyed by Misfortune or Calamity.

51. A media crisis—versus a crisis due to natural disaster or tragedy— is a crisis created primarily by sensationalistic media coverage.
- Public messages should always focus on transparency to establish trust.
 - In a true disaster, as stated earlier, the priority is to keep the public informed. In a media crisis, how the media and the public are informed can make a big difference.
 - The Institute for Public Relations quote on the screen points to the importance of framing a response to positively affect public perception.
 - The information that is provided in a polarized situation can be a double-edged sword, especially in today's world of hyper-communication.

Quote source: http://www.instituteforpr.org/wp-content/uploads/Perception_is_Truth_Garcia.pdf

52. Know your history. If there has been negative PR or controversy in the past, it will likely come up again. Have an appropriate response prepared.
- Leave the posturing to the legislature. Try to stick with factual information that affects taxpayers now and avoid speculating on what might happen if tax policies change.
 - It is okay to provide conceptual responses based on broad concepts of tax policy, but avoid getting into the fray of ongoing tax reform issues that may or may not become reality (usually not).
53. Here is an example of sensationalist media coverage. The media did not create this extreme look but they certainly catered to it. I wonder how long this guy spent preparing for this political forum meeting in Indiana.
54. This slide shows coverage by media and special interest groups concerning efforts in 2012 to abolish the property tax in North Dakota. Because it was a divisive issue, with strongly held opinions on both sides, it makes a good example of what the media does best...showcasing controversy. The polarizing headlines were taken directly from the media coverage. New media, such as Internet news sites in particular, gravitate to polarized news to compete with the many other news outlets available online.

55. Media/PR Practitioner Relations

- Personal relationships are key to successful interaction between the PR practitioner and the media. These professional relationships help to break down the barriers of perceived self-interest that traditionally exist on both sides.
- PR Practitioners link the government to the people they are governing, in order to do this, there must exist a form of trust and validity in what is being communicated. All sides, not just those serving government, should be presented to the public.
- The information being disseminated directly and often significantly affects the everyday lives of the public.
- The Media wants to report government news: Development of property tax policies issues are a topic that reporters are always willing to cover. The key is to influence the tone of that reporting by providing accurate and verifiable information.
- “Information subsidies” (prepackaged information) simplifies communication with the media

Definition: *Information subsidy* is a term used to describe the generation by practitioners of prepackaged information to promote their organizations' viewpoints on issues, with little cost (in terms of time or money) or effort to the person receiving the information (Zoch and Molleda, 2006).

56. Next I would like to share a story with you from our good friend and past Communication Committee member—
Alaska State Assessor Steve Van Sant

As Steve tells it: There was an assembly meeting one evening to discuss property tax bills being sent to taxpayers the following week. He was unable to attend but his reporter friend covered it.

Steve's name was mentioned several times because he had developed a new system to assure the bills got out on time. The next day the reporter's story contained a "quote" from Steve that he had obtained "at the meeting!" That morning, the mayor called Steve in to discuss his "quote" and to inform him that he did not appreciate it. Steve had no idea what the mayor was talking about until he showed Steve the story.

Steve's "friend" the newspaper reporter wrote, "when Assessor Steve Van Sant was asked about the new system and how it worked Van Sant stated, **'It works just fine and now People can render unto Caesar the things which are Caesars!'**"

While it did contain some humor, it was humor Steve could do without! He informed the Mayor that he had not been at the meeting but would certainly follow up on the "quote!"

When Steve contacted the reporter and asked him about the quote the response was, "Well, Steve, you weren't there and I needed something from you. I thought the quote sounded like something you would say, so I gave you credit for it!"

Steve learned from that experience that while you should build a good rapport with news reporters, you should keep your distance so you only need to defend the things you actually say!!!

57. These points displayed on the screen come from the Code of Ethics for members of the Society of Professional Journalists <http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>

Journalism ethics were born from the combination of ethical philosophies and principles.

Journalists apply John Stuart Mill's principle of utilitarianism most often. Utilitarianism is rooted in the principle of seeking the greatest good for the greatest number of people. If reporters and editors agree that publication of a story will benefit more people than it would harm, the article is published.

Journalists also use the principle of the Golden Rule as well. The phrase "do unto others as you would have them do unto you" holds many journalists accountable for their actions as reporters. These philosophies, as well as others, build the core of media ethics.

Read more: [Code of Media Ethics | eHow.com http://www.ehow.com/about_6521911_code-ethics-media.html#ixzz1xEoXF2Rt](http://www.ehow.com/about_6521911_code-ethics-media.html#ixzz1xEoXF2Rt)

Code of conduct from U.S. Dept. of State, specific to the press office
<http://infousa.state.gov/media/journalism/ethics.html>

Media policy examples <http://www.media-policy.org/government.html>

58. Here is another story from Wade Patterson who is a past chair of the Communications Committee. I quote:

In Oklahoma each year we are required to travel to each small town in our county for at least one day, to make personal property assessments. So, around the second week of January we make our annual rounds. I contacted the local radio stations and the newspaper to ask if they can make a public service announcement, which they frequently do.

One of the local radio stations decided to put a different twist on the announcement. The two DJs are friends of mine and are always giving me a hard time about being the assessor. The DJs decided to take the announcement and turn it into a "rock concert tour" Every day they would come on the air and do an entire skit about where the "County Assessor Band" would be performing that day. They really made it fun and lightened the mood.

I had more people come into the office laughing because they heard these guys on the radio and it reminded them to turn in their personal property reports. We have never had so many people "happy" to comply with personal property reporting requirements.

By the way, I have worked with these two DJs for years on other issues and had already developed a good working relationship. It goes to show that you need to keep a good sense of humor in our profession.

59. In general, do you think the media reports property tax issues without bias?

Yes?

or

No?

60. In a 2005 study, researchers identified eight factors of newsworthiness

The researchers determined that PR practitioners and the media tend to agree on the importance of these factors. The criteria was not applied to the news audience.

These factors were first identified as being important and then ranked.

- Timeliness: News must be relevant to current events
- Cultural proximity: Reporting that relates to commonalities of a group such as nationality, language, level of education, political affiliation, or other shared sameness. This creates more interesting reporting for that group.
- Localness: Greater interest because it personally affects the audience.
- Immediacy: The information must be made available quickly. This is especially true in crisis reporting when getting information to the public quickly affects safety and well being.
- Human Interest: Readers must want to read it.
- Unexpectedness: Out of the ordinary news tends to be more interesting and attract more attention.
- Breaking News: News that is happening in real time or is ongoing has more interest.
- Prominence and Significance: This includes reporting on celebrities and well-known public figures and reporting on events that affect many people such as the economy, foreclosures, and natural disasters.

Previous studies identify other criteria for newsworthiness, but this is more succinct. Categories and definitions can change over time as the lines blur between organized media and individuals and small groups that produce online publications.

(Supa, D. W. and L. M. Zoch. 2009. Maximizing Media Relations through a Better Understanding of the Public Relations-journalist Relationship: A Quantitative Analysis of Changes over the Past 23 Years. *Public Relations Journal*, Vol. 3. No. 4, Fall 2009).

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/News_values

61. For press releases and informational brochures provide a summary of what your message contains up front so the audience can anticipate what you are presenting and can easier follow the message. Providing **Who, what, when, where, and why** up front is a standard practice that audiences have come to expect.

62. Here are the original 7Cs of effective communication as they first appeared in the 1952 book *Effective Public Relations*. The book now in its 11th edition and is still in print today. It is known as the “bible” of public relations.”

Scott M. Cutlip, Allen H. Center, *Effective public relations*, 11th Edition, copyright 1971, pp. 260-261. Prentice-Hall, Inc. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.

63. Regarding Completeness

- Do not intentionally omit relevant information.
- Providing more information than was asked for will often be appreciated and provide a foundation for further good media relations.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, say so and then find out and get back with an answer.

64. Regarding **Conciseness**

Avoid fluff, extra words, repetition, rambling... It works for webinars too...

65. Regarding **Consideration**

Keep it about them and not about you.

Assessor's offices have an uphill PR struggle and need to take advantage of every positive opportunity.

66. Regarding **Concreteness**

- The more factual you are the less your statements can be misinterpreted.
- Graphs and tables are very effective tools for explaining issues concretely.

67. Regarding **Courtesy**

- Be sincere, respectful, polite, and considerate
- Avoid slurs or judgmental statements
- Follow the **GOLDEN RULE**: Treat others how you wish to be treated
- Courtesy works both ways and should be insisted upon from all parties

68. Regarding **Clearness**

- It is not communication unless you are understood
- Request feedback to determine clearness
- Keep it simple. A larger audience = a simpler message
- Be willing to back simple messages with additional facts when warranted

69. Regarding **Correctness**

- Always have someone fact check your work and verify grammar and spelling.
- Answer the question that is being asked.
- Correct assumptions made by the media when necessary.

70. More Cs

There have been many adaptations of the original 7 Cs over the years that include all of the words on your screen. Most of them have similar meanings and encourage accuracy, transparency, honesty, and ethical behavior.

71. Oh, and one more "C" for CREDIBILITY. It is the culmination of a well-crafted message.

Credibility is earned by consistently following clear communication guidelines.

A comparative study showed that PR practitioners have had difficulty gaining the respect of the media over the past 23 years (since 1984).

The study showed that:

- The media does not trust PR practitioners to understand what is newsworthy.
- The media resists using provided PR materials as a way of asserting independence and reducing competition with the advertising side of publishing.

Ways to address these perceptions are:

- Remember that success in the field of assessing does not necessarily translate to success in media relations. Sometimes it is better to engage professional help.
- Primary media contacts within a jurisdiction often do not perform the PR function as their primary role and must therefore focus more sharply on maintaining credibility.
- Maintaining good media relations minimizes credibility issues.
- The credibility of some forms of mass media has also come into question in recent years so being careful about the media outlets you communicate with is important.
- The Internet has played a factor in credibility and online reporting should be backed by substantial facts and credible authoritative resources such as a jurisdiction website.

(Supa, D. W. and L. M. Zoch. 2009. Maximizing Media Relations through a Better Understanding of the Public Relations-journalist Relationship: A Quantitative Analysis of Changes over the Past 23 Years. *Public Relations Journal*, Vol. 3. No. 4, Fall 2009).

72. Visuals are an effective way to enhance your message—a picture is worth a thousand words.

- This chart from the Weber County, Utah, valuation notices provides a clear idea of how tax dollars are being used to provide services.
- Focus on the positive and have prepared positive points—This approach helps avoid negative conflicts with the media and keeps your message on a path that you control;
- A goal is to encourage media coverage that is either neutral or positive and to discourage negative coverage.
- The next image from Maricopa County, Arizona graphically shows where property tax dollars go.

73. Always include full contact information and additional resources available from the assessor's office, especially for electronic inquiries.

- Let people know who you are and how you can be reached.
- Identify office hours and locations in all communications whether written or electronic.
- Consider an automated response to simple online inquiries so staff can handle more important inquiries.

74. Wrapping it Up

Next we wrap things up with some final comments.

75. Pressures to be efficient sometimes supersede the desire to maintain a certain level of personal interaction. A newspaper article from Minnesota points to increased reliance on phone automation and electronic information systems as replacements for front-desk receptionists. While automated processes certainly have value, small jurisdictions are sometimes forced to rely exclusively on automated systems in lieu of front-desk personnel.

Communications Committee member Rebecca Malmquist is the City Assessor for Minnetonka, Minnesota. In her jurisdiction, they believe **strongly** in the power of personal interaction. If someone is interested enough to show up at the office in person, being helped immediately by a service-desk person is a normal expectation. It is nice to see that some jurisdictions continue to value personal communication (in addition to supporting technologies) as an effective way to address taxpayer issues.

- 76.** Be prepared. Advance preparation is the most important thing you can do to foster good media relations.
- The top bullet points are essentially the same and address common issues. They provide a simple way to provide information without using excessive people resources.
 - Online information should also be prepared in advance.
 - Scripts are useful for speeches, talk shows, and webinars. Always ask for a topic in advance or suggest a topic if you are able to do so. Share the script in advance if possible
 - Prepare responses and identify known hot topics in advance. Some examples are:
 - Effects of foreclosure and mortgage fraud on property values
 - What state subsidies are being received
 - What local services are funded by property taxes
 - The relationship between local school funding and the property tax including the mix of state subsidies and local funding
 - Information about exemptions for homesteads, businesses, and corporations
 - Local government finances (with or through approved local government entities)
 - Identification of special purpose districts within a jurisdiction and how they benefit the community.
- 77.** For local reporting, questions should be directed to the Public Relations Officer or designated representative of a jurisdiction. If the PR Officer is not available you can direct inquiries to existing authoritative sources of information, such as those listed in the slide.
- The U.S. Census Bureau came out last year with America's Economy, a mobile app that provides updated statistics on the U.S. economy.
 - IAAO technical standards provide a guide to best practices and the IAAO *Standard on Public Relations* contains guidelines for maintaining local media contacts.
 - IAAO brochures also are an information resource on a more basic level.
 - All of these resources (except the Assessed Value Cap paper) are publicly available and accessible by the media.

For broader policies and practices information, citing authoritative sources of information is an obvious but sometimes overlooked choice. The sources shown are not exhaustive but are a good starting point for providing the media with information. Citing these resources adds weight and authority to your statements. There is a caution though—sending the media to these resources without interpretation bears the risk that they may come to inaccurate conclusions based on their own interpretation. Because most reporters face tight deadlines it is better to provide information directly and use the sources above to enhance the credibility of your statements.

- 78.** When your office receives unsolicited media inquiries:
- An immediate response is not necessarily required
 - Collect full contact information and the topic of inquiry. Knowing who a media caller is can be helpful when framing a response, especially if the media outlet is known for sensationalistic news or one-sided coverage of issues.
 - Let the media contact know who will respond and when.
 - Confirm the deadline for responding.
 - Route inquiries to the designated media contact who can then interpret the request and prepare an appropriate response.

79. Here are some Ground Rules and Strategies to live by:

- On the Record or Off? (Nothing is ever off the record)
- Quoting sources (only with advance permission)
- Exclusive stories (do not submit to multiple outlets)
- Errors and retractions (admit it fix the problem right away, eat crow)
- No comment or...? (it is a bad idea to say “No Comment.” If you don’t know say you will get back on that...then do it)
- Off color comments and humor (Absolutely not for off color! (No gross or inappropriate humor. During a crises situation is especially not a time to make jokes.)

Example: New Jersey Governor Chris Christie coming clean on his Bridgegate issue. We will see if being an expert at PR will make a difference for him.

80. Here are a few more Ground Rules and Strategies

- **Acronyms and jargon**

Avoid them.

Being clearly understood is a priority. If, you say, “Bill No. 46 is being reviewed for conformity to FOIA,” you are not doing anyone a favor.

- **Ask for topics in advance**

- **Deflect the negative**

Most negatively worded statements can be redrafted to be positive.

- Having positive talking points prepared in advance can help in a real time situation.

- **Regarding personal opinions versus professional opinions**

DON’T express personal opinions. They only fuel controversy, especially if they differ from official opinions. Personal opinions are in the realm of political activists others seeking to polarize public opinion.

- If you MUST express a personal opinion be sure to indicate that it is your opinion and not representative of your organization.

- **Ask for clarification**

“Questioning the question” allows you to clarify points that might otherwise not be addressed. It is an effective way of challenging bias in questions.

Example of a bad question: “Why are property taxes disliked?”

An appropriate response might be: Are they disliked? Emergency services, street maintenance, utilities support, and education funding are services that most communities welcome and they are made possible by the local property tax.

- **I’ll get back to you on that...**

- With FOI requirements, open meetings laws, and public and media scrutiny, it is not practicable to say “no comment.”
- A response is almost always required even if it is to confirm that certain information is legally protected from public disclosure.
- Saying “I’ll get back to you on that” can be acceptable as long as you respond within a reasonable period.

81. What to do when the media (or possibly yourself) gets it wrong?

- First, it is better to get it right in the first place.
- Always provide written facts in advance to reduce errors lost in translation.
- Offer to confirm facts before publication. Reporters may balk at this as a breach of etiquette thinking it compromises their independence, but the offer should still be made.
- If you have a good relationship with the press they might not mind. Keep in mind the deadlines a reporter has. If you can't do it when they are ready then don't offer.
- If an error is minor error consider simply letting it go.
- If it is a major error, call the reporter and ask for a correction. You may be able to get a concession to get more exposure in the media at a future date as well. If an opportunity is there, ask for it.
- Broadcast media is different. Very rarely will you get a correction notice unless a program is recorded. Ask that a correction be posted on the launch page if a program is recorded.
- If the tone of coverage is negative or hostile then make a note for future reference in your media contacts file.

http://www.agriculture.purdue.edu/agcomm/ontarget/0809/what_to_do.htm

82. In summary, here are the most important aspects of positive communication with the media:

- Stick to the facts
- Maintain credibility
- Pursue transparency in all communications
- Be prepared

83. In closing, the IAAO Communications Committee, Chris, and I appreciate your participation in today's program.

Commonly Asked Questions

What can employees who are not designated the Public Information Officer (PIO) within the assessor's office do to promote positive public relations?

- Everyone within a jurisdiction should know how their PR system works.
- Know who the designated PIO is and refer media inquiries to that person.
- If the PIO is not immediately available, be prepared to offer information about how to submit an inquiry, which could be by e-mail, voicemail, or written memo taken during a phone call.
- Ask your PIO what official resources are available to direct people to for routine inquiries. Approved resources would typically be a website, an official social media site, informational brochures or bulletins, and application forms or other publications. Make sure that the person inquiring knows how to contact the PIO if their question is not answered by these kinds of resources.

What if I come from a small jurisdiction that does not have a designated Public Information Officer?

- Usually, the assessor would then fulfill that role as the most qualified and knowledgeable person to handle media questions. Again, you would communicate with the assessor about your role in directing people to either the primary media contact or to approved sources of information.
- Expertise in public relations is not always a primary role of the assessor in a small jurisdiction. Keeping in mind some of the basics we have covered today will help to ensure positive public relations.

What about directing inquiries to an e-mail or voicemail account so they can be addressed?

- Sometimes, it is beneficial to direct inquiries via e-mail or voicemail because it ensures that there is a record of the request and it allows sufficient time to respond appropriately. When directing inquiries in this manner it is important to find out the level of urgency of the inquiry and provide feedback on when a response can be expected and who will provide it. Responses should be timely, preferably the same day or next day. If that is not possible, then responding with a status update should be considered. A record should be maintained for all media inquiries. Document who is making the inquiry and how to contact them.
- Directing inquiries to a designated e-mail account from a website or social media page can be an effective way to preview and route inquiries as long as the e-mails are regularly monitored.

What if the media or a member of the public is fact checking the personal or professional background of an assessing officer?

- ALWAYS refer inquiries like this to the designated PR official. If the PR official is not available then referring to the website is an interim solution. Do not try to answer inquiries like this. It is possible the person inquiring has a negative agenda and is seeking details to support it.

Other talking points

At the time the webinar was developed, there were two committee members with direct contact with the media in their work roles, Steve Van Sant the State Assessor of Alaska and Wade Patterson who is the Garfield County Assessor in Oklahoma.

The Communications Committee developed the presentation using numerous authoritative resources that are included as hyperlinks either directly in the slides or in the presentation notes. The Public Relation Society of America (PRSA) was an important resource.

The presentation is accessible on the IAAO website under Resources/Publications/Topics of Interest/Public Relations. Because it is a free presentation, it is available for use by IAAO Chapters and Affiliates. The script for the presentation is posted as well.

I would like to thank Sam McPherson, the Public Information Manager for Assessor George Rooker, Jr., AAS, at the Davidson County Assessor's Office in Tennessee and Larry Stein, Chief Deputy for Oklahoma County (OK) Assessor Leonard Sullivan for their helpful comments and insights.