



Public Relations Plan

☒ What is Public Relations?

Public relations (PR) is more than getting an interview in your local newspaper or with your TV, radio, or cable station. PR is about reputation—the result of what you do, what you say, and what others say about you. PR expedites two-way communication between your PTA and its public—it is a means to educate and establish credibility.

PR communication tools might include printing fliers, newsletters, or brochures; hosting PTA speakers; developing traveling exhibits; holding special events designed to build reputation in the community; and developing online activities and resources designed to improve communication among members, journalists, and the general public. Using PR can help attract new members, increase meeting attendance, and garner public attention for your PTA's programs and activities.

☒ Your PR Toolbox

Take a few moments to develop a file of basic PTA resources. This will help organize the many PR activities you will undertake. And, it can be used as a preliminary evaluation tool of your PR efforts.

Get to Know PTA

Know PTA's goals, programs, policies, and activities on the local, state, and national levels. Take a few moments to familiarize yourself with PTA national resources, such as *Our Children*, *This Week in Washington*, *The PTA Parent*, and www.pta.org.

Determine Who Your Spokesperson Is

Create a list of PTA leaders who can speak for the organization. Make sure you have the names and telephone numbers of PTA officers. Keep information on your PTA and its activities close at hand.

Develop a Media List

Include reporters' and editors' names, addresses, telephone and fax numbers, and e-mail addresses. This information can be obtained from media directories at your local library, or by calling local TV and radio stations and newspapers to find out the appropriate staff member to receive PTA information. Learn deadlines for sending information.

Communicate with PTA PR Contacts

Work closely with your state and council PR chairs. Contact them to find out how they can help you, and get on their mailing lists for PR materials, press releases, and other information.

☒ Achieving PR Goals

Here are five easy steps to help you achieve your PR goals.

1. Set Realistic, Measurable Goals

Put these goals in writing. For example, you might want to attract 50 parents to a PTA meeting or increase Reflections Program entries by 10 percent.

2. Determine Your Audience

Who are you addressing? PTA members? Parents of students at the school? Teachers and administrators? Community leaders? How will you reach them? Media, fliers, newsletters, community posters, etc.?

3. Contact the Media

Know media deadlines and reporters who are interested in parent involvement and education news. This is where your carefully crafted media list comes into play.

4. Ask for Assistance

Delegate responsibility by forming a PR committee.

5. Consistently Evaluate Your Progress

Determine in advance how you're going to measure the success of your PR efforts.

☒ Working with the Media

You can increase your visibility with media by knowing what types of stories will interest different media representatives. Before contacting the media, determine what they consider newsworthy and how they present a story.

Determine Who Should Be Notified About a PTA Event

A general meeting may be listed in the community calendar section or on a community bulletin board, but it will not be considered news. However, if your PTA is addressing an issue of vital interest to the community, such as education funding or curriculum changes, a media outlet may send a reporter or ask for an interview.

Look for Photo Opportunities

Ask your local newspaper to send a photographer, or send photographs to your local paper immediately after the event. Include photo captions that describe what is happening and identify participants. Be sure your photos show action and activity instead of people simply smiling and shaking hands.

Build Relationships

Position yourself as an information source, and be creative in nourishing the relationship even when there isn't breaking news.

- Invite reporters to lunch for a background briefing on important PTA issues.
- Welcome reporters to a PTA meeting or program.
- Create an e-mail list of reporters and send monthly or bimonthly items of note.

Select Story Ideas That Are Newsworthy

If you bombard the media with letters and press releases about stories that aren't news, editors may begin to ignore all communications from your PTA.

☒ Press Releases

All PTAs should send out press releases. How well a press release is written is almost as important as the information it contains. In general, the most important information comes first, with less important details in later paragraphs.

How to Format a Press Release:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

(FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: These words should appear on the upper left-hand side of the page. You should capitalize every letter)

Mary Smith
Elementary School PTA
Phone: (555) 555-5555/Fax: (555) 555-5555
E-mail: marysmith@pta.org

(Contact information: Skip two lines after "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE" and cite the contact person's name, PTA name, telephone and fax numbers, and e-mail address. It is important to give the person's daytime phone number since reporters work on tight deadlines.)

First Virginia School Certified as a Parent Involvement School of Excellence

(Headline: Skip two lines after the contact information and use a bold face for the headline.)

Virginia Beach, VA (April 24, 2005)—More than 600 students and Elementary School in Virginia Beach have one more reason to take pride in their school. National PTA has certified Elementary School as a Parent Involvement School of Excellence.

(Dateline: This contains the name of the city from which the press release is issued and the date it is being distributed. Follow it with a long dash or two short dashes, then begin the lead paragraph.)

(Lead paragraph: The first (lead) paragraph should grab the reader's attention and should contain relevant information.)

National PTA's certification recognizes schools that uphold the highest standards in parent involvement and provides resources and guidance needed to improve parent involvement programs in schools. Elementary School is one of hundreds of schools to receive National PTA's Parent Involvement Schools of Excellence certification.

"Every child deserves to attend a school of excellence," said National President Linda Hodge. "The certification is an unprecedented opportunity for all schools to achieve excellence and be recognized for their dedication to Parent Involvement."

(Text: After the lead paragraph, fully develop the message in the main body of the press release.)

As part of the certification process, Elementary School formed a team consisting of the principal, teachers, parents, students, and representatives from the community; completed an assessment; and applied for Certification of Excellence".

Elementary School PTA us a leader in reminding our community of its obligations to children, Elementary School PTA has prided itself in being a powerful voice for children, a relevant resource for parents, and a strong advocate for public education. Membership in Elementary School PTA is open to anyone who is concerned with the education, health, and welfare of children and youth.

(PTA history: In one short paragraph at the end of the release, provide information that conveys an overview of your PTA.)

For more information about National PTA's Parent Involvement Schools of Excellence Certification, visit www.pta.org or call (800) 307-4PTA (4792).

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(Endmarks: If the release uses more than one page, at the bottom center of the first page, type words "more." Start the second page with an abbreviated headline and the page number (for example, "First Virginia School, Page 2"). At the conclusion of the press release (whether the release is one page or more), type the pound sign three times (###) or the number 30 at the center of the page.)

Tips for an Effective Press Release

- **Deliver key information quickly:** who, what, where, when, why, and how should be found in the release.
- **Keep it short.** Use action words and simple sentences with common language.
- **Type your release double-spaced**, leaving at least a one-inch margin on all sides.
- **Report the facts, not opinions.** Avoid editorializing and using adjectives such as “outstanding” or “interesting” when describing programs, events, etc.
- **Don’t use titles like Mr., Mrs., Ms., or Miss.** Refer to women by their own names. On second mention, refer to both men and women by their last names only.
- **Verify your facts.** Your credibility depends on the accuracy of the information. Check—and then double check—spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

☒ Additional Public Relations Tools

Media is only one part of a successful PR campaign. There are a variety of communication tools to bring attention to your PTA and to garner support for your programs and activities.

Special Features/Letters to the Editor

- Write about your PTA’s accomplishments, mission, and positions, and submit it as a letter to the editor of your local newspaper, inviting readers to join the PTA.
- Send a press release to local media, as well as school and community newspapers, announcing the start of your membership drive and community-wide event. In addition to providing details on the event, outline your PTA’s programs, activities, and goals planned for the year.

Broadcast Media

- Prepare your own TV and radio spots about your PTA, if feasible. Many local high schools and colleges can help you with production.
- Ask prominent local business and civic leaders to record radio public service announcements (PSAs) supporting parent involvement and PTA, or submit announcer-read scripts (see samples on next page).
- Ask TV and radio station program directors to identify any upcoming interviews or “talk show” themes where PTA input or participation would be appropriate.
- Submit announcements about upcoming PTA events and meetings to community bulletin boards found on local TV and radio stations, and on internet bulletins and community websites.
- Cable TV offers opportunities for promoting local groups, programs, and services. Call your local cable company for more information on public access programming and how you can use it for your PTA. Many stations will give up to 30 minutes each month to community service groups.

Sample PSAs

Each is a 30-second announcer-read radio script.

Health and Safety Message

Everyone is concerned about the health and safety of children, and your local PTA does something about it. That's because people like you step up to make it happen. It's not just about helping your child be healthy and safe at school. It's about helping all children. Become a part of something that works. Visit www.pta.org or call your local PTA at _____.

Funding for Education Message

Your child's school has seen its share of budget cuts, but your PTA does something about it. Not only at your school, but at the national level, too. PTA is working to increase funding for public education for all children. That's because people like you step up to make it happen. Not just at your school, but for all children. Become a part of something that works. Visit www.pta.org or call your local PTA at _____.

Your Internal PR

Your communication with parents at your school and members of the PTA is equally as important as working with members of the media. Good internal PR is often based on word of mouth as well as easy-to-read handouts, such as fliers or newsletters. Successful internal PR efforts will help keep PTA members informed and involved.

☒ Public Relations Resources

Local Media Contacts

Introduce yourself to local newspaper editors, reporters, and photographers. Contact radio, TV, and cable station managers for guidance on submitting press releases and PSAs.

State PR Chair

He or she can provide valuable insights on handling issues specific to your area or state. Ask about media training opportunities to be held at the state PTA convention or other state resources.

PTA National Headquarters

Call the public relations department for help in the PR planning process: (800) 307-4PTA (4782).

PTA National Website

You'll find press releases, articles, information, and news on parenting, education, health, and safety issues at www.pta.org.