

Rotary International  
District 5930



# Public Relations Toolkit

## Background

What is Public Relations (PR)?

Think of the acronym “PR” as standing for *positive relationships*. The practice of public relations is concerned with building a long-term positive relationship with the public. This relationship results in positive media coverage and word-of-mouth.

What is the outcome of public relations?

An effective public relations effort implies that something will change for the better: improved relationships, increased support, reduced tensions, increased loyalty, increased productivity, increased trust, increased financial support, getting people to do something, getting people not to do something, getting people’s consent to let the organization do something.

What is the cost of effective public relations?

Public relations is *free*! Word of mouth and positive media coverage is invaluable to building trust with your public.

Who is the target audience for public relations efforts?

Your PR efforts should be targeted to each of your stakeholder groups. Stakeholders are individuals who have a vested interest in the organization. For Rotary, stakeholders include (but are not limited to): Rotarians and their families, affiliated clubs (Rotaract, Early Act, Interact, etc.), beneficiaries of Rotary projects, local communities, journalists, government officials, donors, etc.

## Getting Started

Remember that you must first have effective *internal* public relations (happy Rotarians!) before you can focus on *external* public relations (community, unaffiliated donors, and media).

Some areas to consider when evaluating your internal PR:

- “People who perceive that they have been or may be abused by an organization will not support them until the abuse is acknowledged or eliminated.” Unfulfilled expectations contribute to most PR problems.
  - *When is the last time you asked a Rotarian why they were discontinuing their membership?*
  - *When is the last time you asked current Rotarians in your club about their experience with Rotary?*
- “People will only fully support ideas they perceive they had a hand in creating.”
  - *When is the last time you discussed service ideas with your entire membership and not just the Board of Directors?*
  - *When is the last time you solicited project ideas from your membership?*
- “People will do things that make them feel rewarded.”
  - *When is the last time you asked your members why they enjoy being a Rotarian?*
  - *When is the last time you acknowledged the individuals who helped make an event happen or who attended a service project?*

## External Public Relations

To build trust in the community, we must be *transparent*. We must be proud to openly discuss our good deeds with others, transparent in letting donors know what their money is specifically being used to accomplish, and creating an image in the public's mind. When a community member sees the Rotary emblem, they should automatically know what Rotary is and what Rotary does. Achieving external public relations is largely dependent on establishing effective media relations.

### Media Relations

- Get to know your local media and the type of stories that they cover. Read your local newspaper, read area community magazines, and listen to the television news (each station if your city has multiple stations—and don't forget about the stations that are in Spanish!). Where might your service project or event fit in these venues?
- Develop a media contact list. This can be done simply by calling, or visiting the website for, the station or newspaper.
- Get to know journalists by pitching a story to them and meeting them face-to-face.
- Contact (typically via e-mail) journalists with story ideas.
- Follow AP Style requirements ([APStyleBook.com](http://APStyleBook.com))
- Be aware of media deadlines.

In the pages that follow, you will be introduced to a variety of methods for reaching journalists with story ideas. Templates for each of these ideas will be provided.

## News Releases (also known as Press Releases)

Purpose: To release an announcement to the news media with the intent of it being turned into a news story. Your news release should be written about a story that is *newsworthy* (of interest to the public). This includes service projects, upcoming events, charitable donations, highlighting special awards or honors that members receive, etc.

The anatomy of a news release:

- Your Contact Information
- Header
  - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
  - FOR RELEASE ON [DATE]
- Headline
  - Between 60-80 characters (not including spaces)
- Dateline
  - The origin (city/state) of the news release
- The content of the release (approximately 400-800 words)
  - Lead: Should be written in third person and should answer the 5 W's (who, what, when, where, why)
  - Body: Should be written in third person (although quotations attributed to someone can use "you," "we," and "I" present tense, and should incorporate storytelling and quotations. Lengthy information can be broken up with bullets
  - Boilerplate: A description of Rotary and contact information for your club
  - Close symbol: "###" centered at the end of your release
- Relevant photos, videos, infographics, or logos

Rotary Logo

Club Name

Club Address

Contact: Name of Club Media Contact

Media Contact Phone Number

Media Contact E-mail Address

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**SOUTHSIDE ROTARY CLUB HONORS THREE CITY EMPLOYEES**  
**AS “UNSUNG HEROES”**

CORPUS CHRISTI, Texas (October 23, 2013) – The Rotary Club of Southside Corpus Christi will honor 3 employees of the City of Corpus Christi with the annual Unsung Hero Award on Wednesday, October 23, 2013 from 12:00-1:00pm at the Corpus Christi Country Club. This award is given to employees who are nominated by their supervisors for working in labor-intensive positions and maintaining a positive outlook on their jobs.

John Doe from the Parks and Recreation Department, Joseph Doe from the Storm Water Department, and Jaime Doe from the Public Utilities department will be recognized with plaques and proclamations by the Rotary Club of Southside Corpus Christi President Jeremiah Doe. Along with their honors, these employees will be provided with a free lunch for themselves and their family members. John Doe was described by his supervisor, Jane Doe, as “the epitome of a dedicated employee...one who never complains...and always enthusiastically accepts projects.” Jaime Doe was described by his supervisor, Jenny Doe, as being “reliable, cooperative, positive, and a team-player.” Jeremiah Doe was described by his supervisor, Jessica Doe, as “ensuring that his customers always feel as though they came first, prioritizing their safety over everything.”

**About Rotary International**

The mission of Rotary International is to provide service to others, promote integrity, and advance world understanding, goodwill, and peace through its fellowship of business, professional, and community leaders. For more information on the Rotary Club of Southside Corpus Christi or the Unsung Heroes Award program, visit: <http://www.southsideccrotary.org>

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## Pitch Letters

Purpose: To pique a journalist's interest in your story. Pitch letters typically accompany a news release, media advisory, or media kit.

The anatomy of a pitch letter:

- No longer than 1 page in length
- Standard business letter formatting
- Your contact information
- Optional headline
- 3-5 paragraphs
  - First paragraph (Lead): Introduces the story and provides a hook to get the journalist interested in the story. Should answer the 5 W's (who, what, when, where, and why).
  - Second paragraph: Explains and emphasizes the relevance of the story. Highlights the person or event that is taking place.
  - Third paragraph: Includes your contact information, instructing information for the journalist, and details media interview availability or an invitation to attend an event.

Media Contact Name  
Media Contact Phone Number  
Media Contact E-mail Address  
Club Social Media Handle

## **Southside Rotary Honors Berry Contracting, Inc.'s Laura Berry as Hometown Hero**

Dear John Doe,

On Thursday, September 26, 2013 from 6:00pm-8:00pm, the Rotary Club of Southside Corpus Christi will honor Berry Contracting, Inc.'s Laura Berry as their 6<sup>th</sup> annual "Hometown Hero" in a fundraising dinner to be held at the Corpus Christi Country Club. This tribute will celebrate Berry's outstanding community service. Festivities will include a silent auction and 50/50 raffle. The event is open to the public. The cost to attend is \$75 for individual tickets and \$140 for couple tickets. Table sponsorships are also available (at 8 seats per table), ranging from \$750-\$1,500. The proceeds from this event will benefit local community service projects, including scholarships to Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, the building of wheelchair ramps for people with disabilities, and EarlyActFirstKnight®, a character education program for elementary and middle school children.

Berry started the "Berry Contracting, Inc." business with her husband, Marvin Berry, and devoted most of their time and energy to the company. Over the years, the company has thrived and is now the largest privately owned company in Corpus Christi. Berry Contracting, Inc. employees over 3,000 people, with offices in Houston and Friendswood, Texas; New Orleans, Belle, Chasse, and Morgan City, Louisiana; Tulsa, Oklahoma; Billings, Montana; Tampico, Mexico; Colombia; and Canada. Over several decades, Laura has given much time and resources to her community, including organizing a support group for ALS patients and their families, starting a loan bank for ALS patients, and serving on numerous county commissions, boards, advisory boards, and organizations.

Ms. Berry will be available for media interviews from 5:00-6:00pm and from 8:00-9:00pm at the Corpus Christi Country Club. We would like to invite you to be our guest at the Hometown Hero fundraiser event at no cost. Please contact me at the phone number or e-mail address above to have your name added to the attendees list. I will be in touch within the next few days to answer any questions that you may have.

Sincerely,  
Media Contact Name

## Media Advisories

**Purpose:** Alerts the news media to an upcoming news event with the intent of having them attend. Media advisories should be sent to journalists several days (no more than one week) prior to the event and should be followed up with a phone call. The advisory should be redistributed one day before the event as a reminder.

The anatomy of a media advisory:

- Approximately 1 page in length
- Written using an outline format
- Media contact information
- Headline
- Body
  - First paragraph: A brief summary of the event, with a description of the purpose and relevance.
  - The 5 W's should then be covered in outline format.
  - Final paragraph: Include information on how interviews can be set up between a spokesperson and the media, contact information that can be used by reporters, and information about your organization.

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Media Contact Name

Media Contact Phone Number

Media Contact E-mail Address

Club Social Media Handle

September 6, 2014

### **Southside Rotary Ramp Champs To Build Ramp For Accident Victim**

On Saturday, September 6 from 8:00am-11:00am, the Rotary Club of Southside Corpus Christi “Ramp Champs” will be building a wheelchair ramp for a woman who was severely injured in a cement truck accident in July.

**WHO:** The Rotary Club of Southside Corpus Christi

**WHAT:** Building a wheelchair ramp for recent accident victim

**WHEN:** Saturday, September 6, 2014 from 8:00am – 11:00am

**WHERE:** 555 Address Drive, Corpus Christi, TX (please do not publish address)

**WHY:** The recipient will be getting out of the rehabilitation hospital and will not be able to return home until she has a ramp installed at her home.

Photos and video photography are welcome at the ramp site. Interviews with Club President, John Doe, and the ramp recipient’s family members will also be available.

The building materials are purchase through funds raised at Rotary Club of Southside Corpus Christi fundraising events, and the labor is done by Southside Rotary members at no cost to the recipient. The main goal of the “Ramp Champs” is to give better mobility to members of the Corpus Christi community. Club members build approximately six to eight ramps per year with the program now in its 14<sup>th</sup> year. To learn more about Southside Rotary, find us on Facebook or at [www.southsideccrotary.org](http://www.southsideccrotary.org)

## Radio Spot Announcements

Purpose: A written script to be read live on air by a DJ, designed to raise awareness or call the public to action. This is a radio version of a public service announcement.

The anatomy of a radio spot announcement:

- Standard length:
  - 10 seconds (10-25 words)
  - 15 seconds (30-35 words)
  - 20 seconds (40-50 words)
  - 30 seconds (60-75 words)
- Message:
  - Should include the name of the sponsoring organization
  - Should be simple and cover one key point
  - Should include a *hook* (a statistic, slogan, or attention getter)
  - Should request an action from the public
- Formatting:
  - Include organization's name
  - Include organization's contact information
  - Include a title
  - Include the length of the spot
  - Include the spot
    - Double-spaced
    - Multiple spots on one page for 10-20 second spots
    - 30 second spots should be on separate pages
    - Include close symbol “#####”
- Packaging:
  - Sent in packages of 2, 3, or 4.
  - Call station to confirm preferred formatting/timing

Rotary Club of Southside Corpus Christi  
6300 Everhart Road  
Corpus Christi, Texas 78413

“END POLIO NOW” :30 SEC. LIVE RADIO SPOT

WHILE POLIO IS A DISTANT MEMORY IN MUCH OF THE WORLD, IT STILL EXISTS IN MANY COUNTRIES. ONE IN TWO HUNDRED INFECTIONS RESULTS IN IRREVERSABLE PARALYSIS. THE ROTARY CLUB OF SOUTHSIDE CORPUS CHRISTI WOULD LIKE YOU TO KNOW THAT FOR AS LITTLE AS SIXTY CENTS, YOU CAN PROTECTED A CHILD AGAINST THIS DISEASE FOR LIFE. CALL 361-555-5555 FOR MORE INFORMATION.

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## Social Media Posts

**Purpose:** To facilitate two-way communication between an organization and the public with an overarching goal of relationship building. To enhance trust, you should ask questions, answer questions, personalize replies, provide instructing information when problem solving is necessary, and share relevant photos and videos.

**Rationale:** You may be asking whether you need to use social media. Social media is an important public relations tool because:

- It is the first place the public goes for information
- The media and public follow and read updates
- Information can be updated easily and quickly
- Organizations can use this to create an image for their brand
- This platform encourages two-way communication
- This platform reaches a wide range of age groups

**Timing:** Effective social media use is an art form. There are certain days and times of day where people are more active on social media and, thus, are more likely to see your message.

- In general, Monday through Wednesday are the best days to post
- Tuesday is the most active day on Twitter and Facebook
- 9:00-10:00am, 12:00-2:00pm, and 3:00-5:00pm are the best times

The good news is that you can schedule your posts, using free tools like Facebook Analytics and HootSuite to schedule your posts ahead of time if you will not be around a computer during those times.

**Amount:** Too many posts in a day can drive your users away and harm your public relations efforts. You can post roughly every 3 hours on Twitter, but no more than twice per day on Facebook.

## Social Media Content Ideas

Guidelines: The majority of your posts should be engaging or sharing other people's content (that is relevant to your organization). The following list contains ideas for the type of information that you should share on social media:

- Posts from your club's or RI's blog
- Press coverage of your club/links to news releases
- News articles on relevant topics (such as polio)
- Other people's relevant content
- Stories/photos/videos/statistics re: Rotary's impact
- Photos or videos from events and/or "behind the scenes"
- Event announcements
- Posts about events with a unique hashtag
  - Hashtags (#) are used on social media to help users locate content and to group conversations around a topic. Your hashtags should be clear, concise, and the topic should be obvious. Your hashtag will be part of your main post.
  - I am having such a great time at #RIConvention14
  - The #SRCRampChamps are at 555 Street Drive building a ramp—come out and join us! We're here until 11am.
- Stories about your club's members

Goal: The goal of all social media posts is to maximize social media engagement, which includes the number of comments, replies, shares, retweets, clicks, favorites, likes, etc.

The post below is an actual tweet posted on Twitter by Rotary International. This tweet illustrates Rotary's impact on the community and its partnership with ShelterBox. It also includes a link to an article with photos.



In the post below, Rotary International retweeted a post by UNICEF that is relevant to a topic that Rotary cares deeply about (polio vaccinations). The photo is an added bonus, as people love visual indicators of change.



## Other Social Media Considerations

Negativity: At times, angry stakeholders will take to social media to express their concerns. Should you receive a negative post, *do not delete it!* Instead, be empathetic to the user and express concern that they are upset. Encourage two-way direct communication by asking them to call or e-mail you to further discuss their concerns. If the post includes vulgar or profane language, you may delete it but you must include a post on your main page letting people know that it was deleted because of language.

## Final Considerations

When building/maintaining a “brand,” or image for your organization, it is important to be consistent. The goal is for us to gain press coverage of our club-level efforts to contribute to the larger brand of *Rotary*. This means that we must follow Rotary’s public relations guidelines regarding the use of the logo and Rotary colors. For more information visit <https://www.rotary.org/myrotary>

**Rotary**



## About The Author

Dr. Michelle M. Maresh-Fuehrer is currently (2014) President-Elect of the Rotary Club of Southside Corpus Christi. She is an Assistant Professor of Communication at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and has taught numerous undergraduate and graduate courses in crisis communication and public relations. She recently authored a book on crisis communication, titled "Creating Organizational Crisis Plans," which can be found on Amazon.com and at Barnes and Noble bookstores. She is currently in the process of co-authoring a public relations textbook with a colleague. Her research has also appeared in "The Handbook of Crisis Communication," "Persuasion in Your Life," and various academic journals. She is a member of Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi's i-CERT campus emergency response team and regularly conducts training and development sessions on the topics of crisis communication and public relations for local organizations. FMI: [michelle.mareshfuehrer@gmail.com](mailto:michelle.mareshfuehrer@gmail.com)