

Public Relations Officer

The chapter public relations officer is NARFE's principal means of positive communication with the press and local public concerning NARFE activities and accomplishments.

Public Relations Officer Basic Responsibilities

- ★ To make NARFE known throughout the community by informing the public about chapter meetings and activities.
- ★ To foster public appreciation of NARFE and federal retirees and employees in the community.
- ★ To increase public respect for the chapter as a constructive element in the community.
- ★ To ensure that elected officials from your state and district are kept fully informed on issues affecting NARFE chapter members.
- ★ To make a continuing effort to see that newspaper editors and radio/television producers receive and understand the facts, and NARFE's position, on controversial issues.
- ★ To create opportunities for chapter and other Association officers to address civic, business, religious, and other local organizations.
- ★ To respond to unfair and unbalanced news stories pertaining to federal civil service and retirement.
- ★ To study position papers, fact sheets, and other informational material from the National Office and put the material to use.

- ★ To be alert to opportunities to sign up new members and publicize any chapter recruitment activities. Coordinate closely with membership chairperson.

Maintaining Community Relations

Every NARFE chapter should have a strong and vigorous community relations program. The public relations officer can be the key to a successful program through his or her effectiveness in taking the following steps:

- ★ Get to know the opinion leaders in your community: editors, business persons, educators, the heads of veterans organizations, unions and civic clubs.
- ★ If resources permit, create a speakers bureau and offer well-qualified NARFE members to speak on issues of current concern to NARFE members, their professions, or other subjects in which they are expert.
- ★ Encourage outstanding NARFE members to serve on citizens advisory committees, and make their availability known to the appropriate authorities.
- ★ Take part in public service programs on radio and television, and on "talk shows" dealing with subjects on which you or one of your members are expert.
- ★ Attend meetings and hearings conducted by the city council, school board, zoning board, housing authority and other government bodies; take a constructive stand on community issues.

Duties & Responsibilities: Public Relations Officer

Reaching the Correct Audience

The mass media (newspapers, magazines, television and radio) offer the most effective means of reaching the general public.

- ★ **Newspapers, radio and television news departments are competitive** — they appreciate receiving information and press releases.
- ★ **Weekly and small daily newspapers** are more inclined to focus on community events and good news than are large metropolitan dailies. Since the local papers generally are read more thoroughly, diligence in serving small newspapers and radio/television stations can be as valuable as serving large ones.
- ★ One of the best-read pages of any newspaper is the **editorial page**. Since many editors and editorial writers look to their own news columns, letters to the editor and personal contacts for the bulk of their editorials, they are always open to ideas and suggestions. Make it a habit to periodically contact them through visits, calls and correspondence.
- ★ **Radio and television talk show hosts** are always looking for interesting subjects and guests. Let them know that NARFE has knowledgeable officers and speakers available to discuss federal and retirement issues.

- ★ The **Internet** provides opportunities never dreamed of a decade ago to promote NARFE activities and policies. Federation and chapter Web sites enable information to reach unlimited NARFE members and non-members quickly and easily. If your federation or chapter does not have its own Web site consider designing one. A web site is inexpensive and relatively easy to maintain.

Tips for the Publicist

The following are suggestions to keep in mind when preparing your public relations campaign:

- ★ Get to know the newspeople in your community. Ask them about their organization and deadlines, and with whom to deal.
- ★ Let the newspeople know how you can be reached and who will be your backup in the event of your absence.
- ★ Limit news releases and press conferences to topics that are newsworthy and timely. Otherwise you will create a credibility problem, and your releases will receive little attention.
- ★ Inform yourself thoroughly before calling or visiting the press. Whenever possible, offer documented background material with facts and data that the reporter will find helpful after the interview.

Duties & Responsibilities: Public Relations Officer

- ★ Make sure your written offerings to the press are crisp, clear and understandable. Avoid self-serving expressions. When talking to the press, don't wear out your welcome by talking too long!
 - ★ Alert the press to upcoming newsworthy events and to photographic opportunities such as an interesting speaker, a significant achievement, a visiting dignitary, etc. Make a reminder call the day before the event.
 - ★ Don't play favorites. The reporter you slight today will be hard to reach tomorrow. And, don't stop dealing with a reporter who has written a story you didn't like. The next one could make you happy.
 - ★ Deal honestly with the press. It is no disgrace to say, "I don't know, but I will try to get the facts and call you back." Try hard to find out and call back promptly.
 - ★ Look to the National Office and federation for factual information and guidance but, whenever possible, also weave a local angle, quotation or reference into the story.
 - ★ Keep the National Office informed of your initiatives, and particularly of the results you achieve. Send them copies of published articles, letters to the editor and all other significant publicity you generate.
- ★ React two ways to erroneous and misleading stories: first, respond directly to the editor or producer concerned; second, send a copy of the clipping (or transcript of the broadcast) immediately to the federation public relations officer.

Sources of Information

Sources for information and guidance necessary to carry out your public relations program are varied. The following are suggested publications:

- ★ *Public Relations Handbook* (FH-9)
- ★ *NARFE* magazine
- ★ *Quarterly News*
- ★ Federation reports, newsletters and special mailings
- ★ *"10 Worst Mistakes Federal Retirees Make ... And How To Avoid Them"*
- ★ Other informational pamphlets from NARFE PR, Retirement Benefits Service, and Legislation Departments



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