

## The Four-Step Process

*Tip: Start at the beginning. Don't rush to solutions or jump into tactics before research and objectives.*

### Step 1: Research

- Keep these few in number. Identify no more than three to five. One may be enough.
- Research is the systematic gathering of information to describe and understand a situation; check assumptions about publics and perceptions, and check the public relations consequences. Research helps define the problem and publics
  - WHO do we want to reach
  - WHAT do we want them to DO
  - WHAT messages do we want to communicate to each public that will
    - Encourage desired behavior
    - Increase knowledge
    - Change attitudes
- Research terms
  - Primary or Secondary
  - Formal or Informal
  - Qualitative or Quantitative
  - Scientific Method
- Research methods: Know advantages, disadvantages and appropriate application
  - What are some research considerations?
    - Available resources?
    - What other parts of your organization have already done research you could use?
    - Does sample selection give you an accurate assessment of your target population?
    - Size of sample and universe?
    - How will you collect data — survey, telephone, mail-in, on-line?
    - How much time do you have?
    - How scientific do you need to be; what level of confidence do you need to have in the data?
    - What questions will you ask?
    - How will results be used? How will you tabulate your answers?

### Step 2: Planning (goals, audiences, objectives, strategies and tactics)

Tip: The 10 steps for writing a public relations plan will give you the framework to assess any PR situation. Even if you're faced with a case study from an industry with which you are not familiar, walking through these 10 steps can help you look past what you don't know and effectively apply your knowledge, skills and abilities.

- Goals: Longer-term, broad, more global, future statement of "being."
- Example: To become the recognized leader, foster continuing public support, etc.
- Objectives: Shorter-term, defines WHAT behavior, attitude or opinion you want to achieve from specific audiences, how much to achieve, and when to achieve. Objectives should be: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Audience Specific, Relevant, Results (Outcome) Oriented, Time-Specific.
  - Create basis for evaluation
  - Include time-frame

- Include level of behavioral/opinion change (awareness, attitude, action)
- Include publics affected
- Outcome objectives change behavior, awareness, opinion, support. Outcome objectives require high-level strategic thinking.
- Process objectives to “inform” or “educate”
- Input objectives measure activities or inputs, e.g., number of contacts or news releases. Input objectives can help monitor your work but have no direct value in measuring the effectiveness of a campaign.
- Strategies: Road map or approach to reach objectives.
  - Strategies describe HOW to reach your objectives.
  - Strategies include “enlist community influentials to...” “accelerate” and “position.”
- Tactics/tools: Specific elements of a strategy or specific tools, more specifically “how to.”
  - Meetings, publications, tie-ins, community events, news releases, etc.
  - Activities are details of tactics: six meetings, four publications, etc. Activities have dates, indicate who is in charge, attendance expected, etc.

**Step 3: Implementation: Execution of the plan or communicating.**

- Actual messages sent through what channels?
- How many reached targeted audiences?
- Monitoring tools for execution?

**Step 4: Evaluation.**

- Measure effectiveness of the program against objectives.
- Identify ways to improve and recommendations for the future.
- Adjust the plan, materials etc., going forward.
- Can serve as research for the next phase or program.