

# Public Relations Society of America Accreditation Program

## Conventions for Program Terminology Use

Mission. Goal. Objective. Strategy. Tactics/tools. Perhaps no other set of related words has so many definitions in public relations practice. Is a goal supposed to be measurable? Does "position the company as a leader" express an objective or a strategy -- or does it express imprecise thinking? Is a strategy an action or a way of thinking? Do tactics/tools achieve objectives or express strategies or both?

The Accreditation Board that manages the Accreditation testing process recognizes that the debate about terminology probably will never be resolved in day-to-day public relations practice. However, that fact is of little use to candidates preparing themselves for the Accreditation examination.

For the purpose of the Accreditation examination, the following operational definitions should guide candidates' responses to questions in the examination that use these terms.

### MISSION OR PURPOSE

Operational Definition: The overarching reason that the organization came into existence; sufficiently visionary and long-term in scope that it can guide the organization's planning for many years.

Example 1:

To bring affordable transportation to the common person.

Example 2:

To end world hunger.

### GOAL

Operational Definition: Usually a more specific expression of a mission or purpose. Often related to one specific aspect of the mission or purpose. Is commonly described as the desired outcome of a plan of action.

Example 1:

To increase public use of mass transit.

Example 2:

To introduce the people of developing countries to multi-yield agricultural practices.

OBJECTIVE

Operational Definition: Specific milestones that measure progress toward achievement of a goal. Objectives must: 1) address the desired communication or behavioral outcome; 2) designate the public or publics among whom the behavioral outcome is to be recognized; 3) specify the expected level of attainment or accomplishment; and, 4) identify the time frame in which those attainments or accomplishments are to occur.

Example 1:

a. To increase by 8% [level] the ridership of public transportation in the Los Angeles Metropolitan Area [behavioral outcome] by workers earning less than \$25,000 per year [public] within the first 6 months [time frame] of the communication program.

b. To have at least 10% [level] of a randomly selected sample of riders of public transportation in the Los Angeles Metropolitan Area [public] identify as their reason for riding public transportation one of the communication tactics employed in your public relations campaign [behavioral outcome] by the end of the second year of that campaign [time frame].

Example 2:

To have 50% [level] of the natives of one Asian, one African and one South American developing country [public(s)] be reported by field agents as applying multi-yield agricultural practices [behavioral outcome] by 1999 [time frame].

STRATEGY

Operational Definition: The thoughtful, planned general approach to the tactics ultimately undertaken. Strategies do not indicate specific actions to be taken to achieve objectives. There can be multiple strategies for each objective.

Example 1:

Demonstrate that riding public transportation to work is an attractive alternative to driving.

Example 2:

Choose communication vehicles that can be understood by a population with limited education.

TACTICS/TOOLS

Operational Definition: The specific activities conducted to implement strategies of a public relations program. Tactics/tools involve the use of specific personnel, time, cost and other organizational resources. Tactics achieve the objectives and, in turn, support the goals that have been set to carry-out the mission or purpose of the organization.

Example 1:

Design, produce and distribute radio, television and print public service announcements.

Conduct a "Why I'd rather be riding" essay contest.

Example 2:

Design, produce and distribute flash-card, pictorial training materials for volunteer use in training in the use of multi-yield agricultural techniques.

## BONUS ITEM

### How to Prepare A Public Relations Plan

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Like other planning efforts, the public relations plan begins with research and ends with research. Early research discovers audiences, messages and channels of communication. Later research evaluates how well the plan worked.

In between, the plan specifies a series of the "whats" to be done and the "hows" to get them done. It calls for special events, media relations, policy changes — whatever is necessary to reach the objectives. The plan begins with a chassis.

#### Framing the PR Plan

■ **Goal:** The purpose for the plan. It might be crisis management, such as Tylenol faced. It might be a new product promotion, community relations campaign or persuasion campaign ("Buckle up for safety . . ." "Do your heart a favor . . ." etc.) It states the major aim in measurable terms.

■ **Objectives:** Planners break the single goal into objectives, each a part of the goal and all necessary to reach the goal. These are the "whats" to be accomplished. To keep track of them, planners simply label them with an easy decimal system. For example:

- 1.0 "Identify and profile target audiences."
- 2.0 "Assess media relations for the past year."
- 3.0 "Persuade 50 percent of employees to attend the first round of quality circles."

It's important to remember that objectives do not specify how the job will get done. They focus only on what needs doing.

■ **Strategies:** These are the "hows" or PR tools the planner creatively uses to fulfill the objectives. The size of the budget and scope of the job govern the number of strategies. Again, the decimal system keeps things in order. Each strategy receives a number to the right of the decimal. (You'll remember that the

number to the left identified the objective.) Here's what the items might look like:

- 1.1 "Conduct a communications audit."
- 1.2 "Interview 50 key communicators."
- 1.3 "Do a content analysis of media coverage for the past year."

In these examples, the strategies focus on a research objective (1.0 above) so all the strategies are proper research techniques. In other objectives, the strategies will correspond to the objective's purpose. For example, in 3.0 above, appropriate strategies might read:

- 3.1 "Develop and distribute a brochure to inform employees about the success of quality circles in other companies."
- 3.2 "Appoint circle leaders who are respected by their colleagues and who endorse the quality circle concept."
- 3.3 "Kick off the first round of circle meetings with an after-hours reception featuring the CEO of a major Japanese firm."

To be truly operational, however, the PR plan should divide into activities and tasks. First, consider the activities. For example, to "write a brochure" (3.1 above), a PR person needs to:

- 3.1.1 "Interview other firms that successfully use quality circles."
- 3.1.2 "Draft copy for management approval."

Then, divide each activity into tasks. For example, to "interview other firms" (3.1.1 above), a PR person needs to:

- 3.1.1.1 "Identify the firms for interviewing."
- 3.1.1.2 "Develop interview questions."
- 3.1.1.3 "Schedule the interviews."

The operations portion of the PR plan tells the PR manager three important things: Who will do the work? When will it be done? How much will it cost? There is no better way to estimate the cost of a PR plan than by costing out each task, and adding. (Notice how the decimal system keeps identifying which objective, strategy, activity and task the PR manager is considering.)

## Writing the PR Plan

■ **1. Include research.** Make certain that one or more early objectives focus on research. Identify target audiences and break those audiences into groups you can manage. Look for groups needing special messages or appeals and special channels. List these groups in priority order, so that when money or time becomes tight, you'll reach the important ones.

*Example:* Many hospitals today are appealing to specialized audiences for emergency rooms while they let some traditional audiences wait.

Consider the communications audit because it can focus on how successfully your organization communicates its identity to its audiences. (Note: Identity is your organization's mission, products, services, community citizenship, strengths, unique market position and perception of itself.) The audit can target audiences and messages for you.

■ **2. Select messages and appeals.** What do you want to tell your audiences (information)? How do you want them to feel about you (attitudes)? What do you want them to do (behavior)? As you write objectives, you'll see both your motives and your audiences' interests come together.

*Example:* Tylenol communicators wanted their audiences to trust new packaging safety features.

■ **3. Pick effective and economical channels** to reach your audiences. Don't rely only on traditional print approaches. Think personal communications, special events, community relations, etc. These are your strategies. Use a dual test for picking effective channels: Does my audience believe this channel? Does my audience use this channel? Rely on your earlier research and keep to your budget.

*Example:* Lawn services are using direct mail (and a free soil analysis) instead of newspaper advertising. Credibility is high.

■ **4. Evaluate your plan.** To prove the plan worked, include evaluation methods. Use focus panels, "before-and-after" tests of audience attitudes, counts of event attendance, content analysis of media hits, surveys, sales figures, staff self reports, letters to management, etc.

## Presenting the PR Plan

PR Plans have three parts. The background or case statement details the issues and problems leading to the goal. It refers to audiences, known demographic research, given organizational positions, obstacles, history, etc.

The second part sketches broad approaches to solve the problem or meet the challenge. It states and justifies the theme and specifies both the major target audiences and the effects on them.

The third or operational part states specific objectives, strategies, activities and tasks. It should also contain a Gantt (time) chart specifying when each strategy takes place.

Clients, managers and CEOs often request plans as proposals. To be persuasive, write the broad-approaches section (2) in the third person to give an air of objective necessity to the "whats." Write the operational section (3) in the first person to take credit for your creative research themes, and strategies.

Whether or not you are a veteran planner, before you write your next PR plan, read some award-winning campaigns such as the McNeil-Tylenol plan, which won a Silver Anvil Award from the Public Relations Society of America. (Other Silver Anvil plans are in the PRSA Library, 845 Third Ave., NY 10022.)

You'll be surprised how such reading can prime the "creative pump" and nominate you for some awards of your own.

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