

A Practical Guide to Working with Public Affairs



Introduction

This booklet is designed to help you understand the role and mission of public affairs and to work more effectively with your local public affairs staff.

Because so much of what we do is personality driven, there are no guaranteed “formulas” for success. What works in one locations may not work at another.

I've found that professional courtesy, delivering a quality product, sound ethics, and a common sense approach are the underpinnings for successful communication and productive partnerships.

This applies to any interaction you may have with external media as well. If you ever have the opportunity to talk to members of the local or national media about MWR, I encourage you to do so. What MWR does to enrich the lives of soldiers and families is both a good news story and a human interest story worth telling.

Technology plays an ever greater role in how we communicate. Keeping up with developments on the internet, web page design, new software, digitization, and imagery is a challenge in itself!

Should you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call or e-mail me, and be sure to visit our MWR homepage at www.armymwr.com!

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Marketing, Public Affairs: Goals Determine Definition

PA goal is
commander
communication

Marketing and public affairs staffs agree they are both in the business of communication. Marketing is certainly a part of public affairs. But where the two functions differ fundamentally is in their goals.

Public affairs is the commander's communication vehicle. PA enables the commander to send messages internally to his soldiers and families; it enables him to send messages about the Army and its mission externally to the civilian community. The PAO is responsible for the image of the commander, the installation, and the Army. PA is a public relations function with a goal of enhancing and fostering communication.

Marketing
goal is
customer
motivation

Marketing, and its elements – commercial sponsorship, advertising – is a commander's business resource. By definition, marketing is a communication process which results in a buyer-seller transaction: the buyer makes a conscious decision to transfer something of his (time, money, credit) to obtain something the seller has to offer (goods or services). The goal of marketing is selling and generating revenue for the installation MWR fund to help support the commander's community and family programs.

While there are many similarities and overlaps in the two functions, it is the outcomes and goals which define each in the end.

Public affairs officials at all levels are aware of these differences, the issues raised by new Department of Defense policies, and PAO concerns in the field. Department of the Army Public Affairs leadership philosophy mirrors the Army's: operations are decentralized so that local commanders have the greatest flexibility to operate efficiently and effectively. It is within this framework we must all work together to serve America's Army.

Understanding Public Affairs: How You Fit In

What is
Public
Affairs all
about?

Public affairs is about building relationships. According to the teachings of the Defense Information School, the role of the public affairs officers is to *"help the commander lead and manage through effective two-way communication."* Here are some other roles the PAO is to fulfill:

- Interpret trends and issues
- Evaluate attitudes and opinions of various publics (internal and external to the installation)
- Advise the commander on public relations significance and consequences of his actions
- Communications expert; a manager of the communications processes available to the commander
- Serves as the "conscience" of the commander and the staff.

PA's three
areas of
responsibility

The PAO has three areas for which (s)he is responsible: **command information**, **public information**, and **community relations**. As you can see, PA is a communications function. The PAO is on the commander's personal special staff, has direct access to the commander.

Command information is internal information. It includes such things as the post newspaper and town meetings which are just two of the tools a commander can use to inform the members of his command about local and Armywide news and military issues.

Command
information

The Army CI mission, according to AR 360-81, dated 20 Oct 1989, is "to provide timely, accurate, truthful two-way communication between commanders and internal audiences to strengthen deterrence and the Army's war-fighting capabilities. Subjects addressed include the soldiers, the unit, the Army, United States history, government and traditions, and topical items of common interest."

Public information

Public information is external information. In executing this function, the PAO establishes and maintains long term relationships with media in the local surrounding civilian community: newspapers, radio, television. Release of information is governed by specific Department of Defense and Army policies outlined in AR 360-5, dated 31 May 1989.

DOD PA guiding principle

The basic guiding DOD principle is stated as "Maximum disclosure with minimum delay." The PI mission also includes speech writing, itineraries of visiting dignitaries, crisis and disaster relief response planning, media and congressional queries, and monitoring/coordinating media access to the installation.

Community relations

Finally, the PAO is responsible for community relations, or "comrel." The objectives of comrel, according to AR 360-61, dated 15 Jan 87, are to

- Increase public awareness of the Army's mission, policies and programs.

- Inspire patriotism.

- Foster good relations with the various publics with which the Army comes into contact at home and abroad.

- Maintain the Army's reputation as a respected professional organization responsible for national security.

- Support the Army's recruiting and personnel procurement mission.

Add pizzazz to special events

As part of comrel, PAO is responsible for open houses, public visits/tours of post, speakers bureau, observance of national holidays, and, overseas, host nation activities. At many locations, the PAO schedules military bands, drill teams, tactical exhibits/demonstrations, and other military program resources. These resources can add pizzazz to MWR special events.

MWR is in a good position to help the PAO do his job. MWR is good news about soldiers and families, whether it's command information (necessary for their welfare) or community relations (enhancing, fostering partnerships with local arts, recreation departments).

Downsizing affects PAO

PA and newspaper staffs have been reduced as a result of downsizing. There are fewer soldier photo-journalists. In addition, active duty and reserve soldiers in public affairs specialties are more frequently deployed than ever before. For those reasons, it may not be possible for PA staff to be at all the events you would like covered. They should still be offered the opportunity to be part of your team.

Write your own stories; take your own photos

If your marketing staff submits stories (and photos) in the correct journalism style and format, chances of the story being published are much better. Some marketing staff find "stringers," or independent volunteer writers to cover MWR for the post newspaper. To help them write and format those articles, excerpts about news and feature writing from the DINFOS Journalism Handbook are included in this booklet as well as some basic tips.

Write your own radio spots

Using the airwaves is another effective way to reach your audience. The PAO has access to on and off post broadcast media, but may not always have the time to write spots for the events you want covered.

If marketing staff can write broadcast spots in the correct style and deliver them in the right format, the chances of those spots being aired are increased. To help them write broadcast spots, excerpts from the DINFOS Broadcast Style Guide are also included here.

Command messages

Command messages are those over-arching themes you want to convey to your public(s) via all media. Your command messages will vary based on your audience. Command messages should be discussed with your chain of command, as well as coordinated with and approved by your PAO. (See the page on command messages.)

Know them; Repeat them often

All members of the MWR team should know what the local MWR command messages are and should communicate them up front, clearly, and often in every medium.

Working with PAO

Include PA
from the
outset

- Include public affairs in your planning from the beginning, and continue to keep them in the loop throughout the planning and execution process.

Do your
homework

- Request a PA representative be a member of your task force or working committee

- Be open to PA concerns and be prepared to answer them without being defensive

Be a team
player

- Be prepared to provide copies of appropriate regulations, memos of exception to policy, and DOD instructions pertaining to commercial sponsorship and advertising

- Understand and be sensitive to the difference between the PA mission and your mission

- Clearly define – in writing if necessary – what tasks will be performed by which staff

- Meet PA deadlines

- Have frequent face-to-face and telephonic contact with PA staff

Use unit
contacts

- On large installations with division-sized units, provide unit PA representatives with information, particularly if soldiers from their units are providing support to your event

- Make available in sufficient quantity top quality press kits about your event including photos and biographies of performers, schedules, backstage passes, etc.

Treat PAO
staff like
VIPs

- At the event, treat PA staff like VIPs; introduce them to sponsor representatives, performers and celebrities

- Emphasize teamwork

- Follow up, follow through, don't "assume"

Army Public Affairs

Command Information Program

2-13. Style

a. While this regulation does not dictate one particular style for Army newspapers, the newspaper's style should be consistent. The Associated Press Style book and Libel Manual is the preferred style guide for Army newspapers. Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, Second College Edition, or equivalent, is the preferred dictionary of first reference.

b. Terms of reference are as follows:

(1) The AP Stylebook says, "In subsequent reference, do not continue using the title before the name. Use only the last name of a man. Use Miss, Mrs., or Ms. before the last name of a woman, depending on her preference." For Army newspapers, the style is to use only the last name in subsequent reference, regardless of gender.

(2) In Army newspapers, soldiers will be referred to by their rank (e.g., Staff Sergeant, Lieutenant Colonel, etc.), rather than by pay grade (E6, O5, etc.). Pay grade is used only when referring to pay scales.

(3) In Army newspapers, rank should be omitted in sports and other competition stories.

2-14. Staff privileges and credentials

a. Military journalists will be afforded the same rights and privileges as civilian media representatives. (See AR 360-5, para 3-3.)

b. Public affairs officers will issue credentials to identify staff reporters and photographers who prepare material for use in AF or CE publications. PAOs will establish local forms and will exercise caution in issuing credentials to anyone outside the public affairs office.

c. Employees of a CE printer will not be provided PAO credentials; rather, they should carry credentials that identify them as employees of the printer.

Section IV Content

2-15. Editorial contributions

a. Publications may print articles produced outside official channels (e.g., stringers, local organizations), providing permission has been legally obtained and they do not otherwise violate provisions of this regulation.

b. Commercial sponsors may be mentioned with other pertinent facts in news stories and announcements on the Armed Forces Professional Entertainment Program events or events which directly benefit the internal audiences.

c. Book, radio, television, movie, restaurant, and other entertainment reviews may be carried if there is no implication of selective benefit or endorsement by the Department of the Army. The acceptance of gratuities in connection with these reviews is prohibited by AR 600-50, paragraph 2-2. This paragraph does not prevent acceptance of press credentials or passes by public affairs staff members.

d. Publications must offer all private and affiliated private organizations, as determined by the local commander, a fair opportunity to have their material considered for publication. (See AR 215-1.)

e. Material from unofficial organizations may be considered for publication in Army newspapers and CE publications other than newspapers. Such material will not promote the organization's

Command Messages

What's a "command message"?

Why have
command
messages?

"Command message" is a public affairs term for phrases that articulate over-arching themes the command or commander wants to convey to the public via all media.

By establishing and providing command messages, commanders ensure the entire chain of command and staff speak with one voice on a specific subject.

Program staff formulate command messages about their special events and provide them to the public affairs officer in the event the commander or participants are interviewed by media representatives.

Who uses
them?

When spokespersons representing the commander, the commander, or a member of his staff are interviewed on a specific subject, they try to work in one or more of the subject-specific command messages into their responses. Below are sample command messages developed for the U.S. Army Soldier Show. On the facing page are some command messages for Army MWR.

Sample
command
messages for
the Soldier
Show

- The Army's values soldiers for talents beyond their military skills.

- Entertainment provided by our morale, welfare, recreation program is an important element of quality of life here.

- Entertainment for soldier by soldiers is a morale-boosting tradition established by Sgt. Irving Berlin during World War I

- The Army Soldier Show brings wholesome, fun entertainment suitable for families to enjoy together.

Some Sample MWR Command Messages

- 1. The Army cares about soldier and family morale and well-being and is committed to maintaining quality of life.**
- 2. Maintaining the morale of soldiers and their families is the mission of MWR.**
- 3. MWR contributes to readiness and retention.**
- 4. Commanders and MWR managers are responsible stewards of soldier and taxpayer dollars.**
- 5. MWR staff is committed to providing high quality programs and services.**
- 6. Profits from MWR are reinvested in local MWR programs that benefit soldiers and families.**
- 7. Funds generated through commercial sponsorship enhance the scope and quality of MWR programs.**

Freedom of Information Act, the Privacy Act, Libel and Copyright Restrictions

FOIA

This is a disclosure law which provides public access to records in the possession or control of the Executive Branch of the federal government. The primary federal guidance on release of information is contained in the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). An understanding of the FOIA provides the best basic knowledge on federal release of information policy.

The FOIA is a disclosure law which says all information in the possession of the government is releasable except for nine specific categories of information. Further, the act does not require that exempted information be withheld, but rather permits it to be withheld. Public affairs officers are taught that the spirit of the guidance is to release, not to withhold, following the DOD policy of "maximum disclosure with minimum delay."

None of the nine categories deals with information related to MWR activities, but are concerned with national security and other related subjects. Each installation has a FOIA officer; the PAO or legal officer can help locate him.

The Privacy Act provides the following guidance on release of information to external media about individuals. ("Individuals" in this case applies to living persons.)

The Privacy
Act

Age (date of birth): releasable

Home of record/present address: No general rule for the disclosure on a individual's home of record. However, hoe of record may usually be released if no street address is given. In most cases, in response to questions, an individual's present geographical location, i.e. Alexandria, Virginia, may be provided, but not the individual's street address.

Marital status/dependents: The fact that an individual is married (or not married) is

Information
releasable
to external
media under
the Privacy
Act

disclosable, as it is a matter of public record and is disclosable under FOIA. Names, ages and sex of dependents may also be released; check with service regulations for specific guidelines.

Awards and decorations/citations: Releasable.

Race: In most cases, not releasable. To release information from departmental records regarding race may constitute an unwarranted invasion of privacy. It is recognized, however, that such information in circumstances in which it is relevant, e.g., a racially oriented protest or altercation. Where the fact of a person's race is relevant in providing essential facts to the press, it may be released.

Duty status: Releasable.

Photographs in the custody of the Department of Defense: Photographs of DOD military and civilian personnel taken for official purposes are generally releasable unless the photograph depicts matters that, if disclosed to public view, would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy. Generally award ceremony photographs and similar photographs are releasable.

Questions?
Check with
PAO!

Generally speaking, any information about, or photographs of, members of the military being considered for release to external media must first be coordinated through, and approved by, the installation public affairs officer. If you have any doubts or questions concerning release of any materials to the external media, consult your local public affairs officer.

Libel

Libel refers to defamation of character. Always check facts. Quote only recognized authorities and sources and attribute facts and opinions to them. Use "allegedly" and other qualifiers to make readers aware of unproven or questionable information.

Copyrights

Copyrights involve a legal protection of intellectual property, artwork, photographs, videotape, film, and writing. Reproducing or quoting all or part of something copyrighted is illegal unless you have obtained prior [written] permission from the author or publisher.

Tips for Dealing With Reporters

Understand the role of reporters

If you agree to an interview or to talk to a reporter, always take the attitude that the reporter represents the public – and that you want the public to know your story.

Do your homework

Anticipate questions you will be asked. Be prepared. Have the most current information. Practice.

Know what you want to say

Know what main ideas, facts and figures, command messages you want to get across and have them firmly in mind. State them at the first opportunity and repeat them throughout the interview for emphasis. Bridge from answering a question into your command message.

Relate to readers or viewers, not to the reporter

Look at or listen to each question from the viewpoint of readers or viewers. What do readers expect to read? Viewers expect to hear? What should they know?

Be concise; be brief

Depending on the medium, give short or medium length answers. For print media, longer, more explanatory answers are in order. For broadcast media, speak in 12-15 second “sound bytes.” Speak as though each answer will stand alone. Normally, television stories last 60-90 seconds. They will use only one or maybe two of your answers. Each of your segments should contain at least one of your command messages. That’s what the public will hear and remember.

If asked a negative question

If asked a negative question, don’t repeat the question and don’t dwell on it. Answer briefly; then bridge to a positive command message. Turn it to your advantage at first opportunity. Under no circumstances air in-house problems or personal complaints.

Be quotable

Reporters like to use direct quotes or sound bites.

Use clear simple English

Use words and phrases the public understands. Don't use acronyms, initials, abbreviations, in-house jargon, or bureaucratic non-speak. Don't assume readers or listeners know anything about your subject or about the military; they don't!

Illustrate your points

Reporters like examples, but keep them simple and brief. Use facts and hard data whenever possible.

Answer the question

Don't be evasive or try to dazzle the reporter; but answer on your own terms, not the reporter's. Answer the question, then bridge to one of your command messages.

If you're interrupted

Pause, let the reporter finish, and then continue your answer. Don't let the interviewer tell you when you are finished.

If you're asked several questions

Reply, "You've asked several questions. Let me respond to the first one." Answer only one question at a time. Specify which question you'll answer. Ask the reporter to repeat a question if necessary. Don't let an interviewer sidetrack you into answering questions which have nothing to do with the subject at hand. Simply say "I'm prepared to discuss the subject of the interview. Please relate your questions to the subject we're discussing."

Don't accept or repeat reporter's words

Don't repeat a reporter's words unless they represent your view. Don't let someone put words in your mouth. If the reporter is wrong, say so, provide accurate data and try to bridge to your command message.

Never say 'No Comment'

If a reporter wants information you don't have or can't release, simply say you can't release the data and explain why.

Don't answer hypothetical questions

You may not agree with the question or questions, but the answer that appears in print may indicate that you do or your command does. Never speculate. Never discuss subjects outside your realm of knowledge.

If you don't understand

Ask the reporter to repeat the questions, restate it, or explain what (s)he means.

If you don't know

Say you don't know, then offer to find out or direct the interviewer to someone who has the answer or who can get the answer. There is absolutely nothing wrong with saying "I don't know" if that is indeed true.

Practice the difficult questions

Know the skeletons in the closet. Be prepared for hard questions you hope aren't asked (inevitably, they will be!). Know what the command position is on the subject. Know what the command messages are and be ready to incorporate them into your answers.

There is no "off the record"

Expect to see in print or on the air anything and everything you say. Microphones and cameras may not be turned off when you think they are. If you have set ground rules prior to the interview, stick to them and don't let the reporter forget what (s)he agreed to. That includes discussing only the topic(s) you've agreed on. Nothing is ever "off the record" in this day and age.

Never lie

Be factual and honest at all times. Don't even tell half truths or embellish the truth. Doing so can, and probably will, come back to embarrass you and your command. In addition, it destroys any credibility you personally are trying to establish or may already have established with the media.

Tape the session

(this applies to deskside interviews)

Tape record the interview. At the beginning of the session, tell the reporter you're recording. This protects both you and the reporter. Keep the audiotape until after the article has been published or the segment aired. If you think the subject may come up again and it is somewhat controversial, keep the tape longer.

Stay
positive

Remember, you are representing the United States Army and the Department of Defense. Overseas, you represent the USA. You are not representing yourself; you are an official spokesperson. Ponder the potentially wide-reaching consequences of your words and actions. Consider the possible effects on your commander.

Stay cool

Some reporters, intentionally or not, may upset you. Don't get angry. Don't overreact. Counter dumb, inflammatory questions without becoming emotional. Back-brief your public affairs officer and chain of command immediately and identify any potential problems. Document the circumstances in writing or on tape.

Be confident

Reporters like people who say what they mean and are confident.

Opinions

If you state your opinion on a subject, make sure you say very clearly, and repeat at least once, that it is only your personal opinion.

Don't ask to
review copy

Reporters may call you for clarification of issues or to check facts, but they are ethically bound not to take actions that smack of collusion. By asking if you can review a story, you insult their integrity and reveal your naivete about the role of the media in our society.

Know who
you're
talking to

You have the right to know the name of the reporter, her affiliation (who she works for), who the target audience is, approximately when the article or segment is scheduled for publication or airing, and what the story angle is.

No secrets!

We work for the taxpayer. We have no "secrets." Remember, there are 5,000 sources out there - anyone on your installation with a telephone or a facsimile machine! If we don't tell the Army's story the way we want it told, reporters will go elsewhere and print someone else's version which may not be accurate.

This material is adapted from the Department of the Army Office of the Chief of Public Affairs Monthly Update, enhanced with teachings from the Defense Information School.

Hot Tips:

Relax, be natural, enjoy!

Memorize the command message(s)

Answer questions thoroughly
But remember "sound bites"

Always respond

Most Important To Remember

Be natural, be yourself, smile! Tell about yourself, your experiences as a soldier, performer, a person. Stories from the Soldier Show are human interest "good news," positive, "uppers"!

Whatever you decide your command messages are going to be, commit them to memory. Try to incorporate command messages into your answers. Remember, the command messages are not for the reporter, they are for the public: the reader/listener/viewer.

Answer the question. Be thorough, but, at the same time, do not volunteer information not related to the subject matter. For print interviews, you can go into more detail and depth. For broadcast interviews, keep answers to 10-15 seconds in length, don't ramble.

At the end of an interview you may be asked "Is there anything else you would like to add?" Always take that opportunity to repeat a command message or an important idea you want the public to remember. Never say "no" to this question!

Writing Right: Producing Successful Media Releases!

- 1. Get your main point up front; use inverted pyramid style**
- 2. Hook the reader with a good lead sentence**
- 3. Double space**
- 4. Refer to and use the Associated Press Stylebook**
- 5. Be accurate; no errors in fact**
- 6. Consider who's reading**
- 7. Meet deadlines**
- 8. Be sure grammar, punctuation and spelling are error-free**
- 9. Be objective (no editorializing)**
- 10. Attribute quotes or editorial comments to their source**



MEDIA RELEASE

THE LATEST NEWS ABOUT ARMY MORALE, WELFARE & RECREATION PROGRAMS

For Immediate Release: [date] For further information contact
Author's name, organization
Telephone/fax numbers

BRIEF TEASER HEADLINE (ALSO CALLED THE "SLUG")

ALEXANDRIA, Va. -- External releases will have a "dateline," using the format shown: caps for city, upper/lower case for state. State abbreviations are not the same as the U.S. Postal Service abbreviations.

Correct state abbreviations appear in the Associated Press Stylebook which is the style "bible" for civilian and military journalists. You can purchase an AP Stylebook at a bookstore or by mail directly from AP in New York.

Recommend using a custom media release form with eye-catching (but not gaudy) graphics.

For internal releases (to your PAO office), type the last name of the author at the top left corner on a plain sheet of paper, about 1.5" down from the edge of the paper and circle it. Start your slug and copy halfway down the page and circle the slug. Side margins should be at least one inch.

Always end a page at the end of a paragraph. Don't split paragraphs or sentences at the bottom of the page, even if it means there's extra space at the bottom of the page.

- more -



Author's name

Press Release Slug/2-2-2

Double space and indent paragraphs five spaces. Do not justify right edge. Keep sentences and paragraphs short.

Always double check spelling, ranks, titles, middle initials of all names. Misspelling names is a "no-no" in journalism and can prove embarrassing.

If you write a story, but you are not the subject matter expert, it's a good idea to put the name and telephone number of the point of contact with the most information about your topic at the bottom, just in case an editor wants to follow up or needs more information.

Releases to external media (outside the gates) must always be cleared with or released through the PAO, with a copy furnished for their files.

- end -